

EVALUATION FINDINGS ON THE  
DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF  
**COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES**



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# EVALUATION FINDINGS ON THE DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

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This document is a distillation of some of IDRC's corporate learning to date on competitive grants processes (CGPs). It draws on work by Anne Bernard IDRC evaluations and a limited number of external sources related to CGPs. It raises some of the main options and issues that IDRC staff face when designing, managing and evaluating projects that include competitive grants.

This document is a quick source of information for IDRC program and administrative staff on evaluation findings relevant to the design and implementation of competitive grants processes.

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Designed for IDRC's  
Evaluation Unit

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

IDRC is using competitive grants processes (CGPs) more and more as a program modality. This electronic document is a distillation of some of IDRC's evaluation learnings about using competitive grants processes. Drawing from IDRC evaluations and a limited number of external sources, this document raises some of the main options and issues that IDRC staff face when designing, managing and evaluating these projects.

**This document is a quick source of information for IDRC program and administrative staff to be aware of evaluation findings relevant to the design and implementation of competitive grants processes.**

The document assumes that IDRC staff will skip to topics that are most relevant to them. Press Ctrl and click on the hyperlinks within the text and at the bottom of pages to move around among sections. This document contains a number of "frequently asked questions" about competitive grants processes. In section 6, case studies lay out how different programs have designed and implemented CGPs, and their reflections on the process.

**Limitations:** Because this document is based primarily on evaluation reports, it has some limitations in its coverage and use. **This document is not a thorough manual or "how to" guide.** Evaluations only address the questions posed by evaluation users. Evaluations do not systemically address all elements of project design and management. Moreover, the evaluations used for this document focus their findings, questions and recommendations on what actually happened in IDRC projects, rather than elaborating on what might be possible within a competitive grants process. Therefore, while this document addresses the brass tacks of CGP design, and raises key administrative and programmatic issues related to the modality, it is not a comprehensive treatment of each subject.

IDRC's experience shows that competitive processes have created good results on many levels. They have helped PIs identify new partners and expand their analysis of research priorities. They have produced excellent research results and produced other benefits. However, CGPs have also entailed administrative and programmatic challenges. Designing and managing competitive grants requires IDRC staff to maneuver through numerous options, dynamics and balances. The current document provides some suggestions of what seems to work, and seems not to work, as documented in IDRC evaluation reports. Many suggestions are tentative, or point out issues to consider. The Evaluation Unit expects that IDRC staff will consider, challenge and revise the current document as corporate learning about competitive grants processes continues to grow.

## SOURCE DOCUMENTS

Anne Bernard's 2007 paper, *Competitive Grants in IDRC: Guidelines for Design, Management and Monitoring*, is the major source document for this electronic document. Her evaluation intends to make explicit:

- what IDRC expects to achieve from competitive grants processes – as unique from other alternatives;
- in what situations competitive grants make the most sense; and
- what benefits should be expected, at what cost to IDRC, its partners and recipients.

Bernard emphasizes that her paper is an *initial synthesis of IDRC "good practice" experience* with the CG modality, and the factors that appear to influence this, positively and negatively. In this respect, the guidelines are expected to evolve over time as Centre officers and managers design, manage and assess their own CG activities against them. They are, therefore, expected to be used interactively... [This] guideline document is built around a number of themes, core questions and optional answers common to the modality overall. It is suggested that these serve as reference points to be considered by, asked of and answered for, each competitive grant case.

Other source documents include Bernard's 2006 review of five Centre evaluations of competitive grants projects. Tillman's 2003 review of small grants programs also included some projects that the current document would classify as competitive grants processes (see the definition below).

In addition to the IDRC literature, this document draws from the Ford Foundation's GrantCraft primer on competitive grants.

The documents are listed in the bibliography. Electronic copies of most of the documents are available via links to irims files.

### 1A. THE DEFINITION OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

Competitive grants processes vary across the Centre in purpose, selection mechanism and funding arrangement. At the same time, they share most of the same design and management assumptions, strategic thinking and implementation challenges.

For the purposes of this document, a competitive grant modality is **a process through which IDRC Programs select projects following a call for proposals directed at institutions or organizations**. The competitive grant modality generally specifies a theme and/or defines a type of methodology or range of methods.

The competitive grant process can be managed directly by IDRC (Centre Administered Projects, or CAP) or by a Recipient Institution which distributes IDRC funds to third parties (Recipient Administered Project or RAP).

Competitive grants generally intend to:

- Explore novel research themes;
- Test emerging research methodologies;
- “Scope out” prospective partnership or recipient bases;
- Enhance the policy influence of development issues; and/or
- Recognize and promote research excellence.

The competitive grant modalities explored in this document refer to small to medium-sized grants managed by individual Program Initiatives. It refers to good practices and learnings from a range of competitive grant types that IDRC has used.

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## 1C. ACRONYMS

CAP	Centre Administered Project
CBNRM	Community-Based Natural Resource Management
CG	Competitive grant
CGP	Competitive Grant Process
CSPF	Corporate Strategy and Program Framework
EGM	External Grants Manager
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
KFPE	Kommission für Forschungspartnerschaften mit Entwicklungsländern (Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries)
LACRO	Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean
MGC	Memorandum of Grant Conditions
PDA	Professional Development Awardee
PI	Program Initiative
PO	Program Officer
RAP	Recipient Administered Project
RoKS	Research on Knowledge Systems
SARO	Regional Office for South Asia
SGP	Small Grants Program
SSA	Sub Saharan Africa
ToRs	Terms of reference
UPE	Urban Poverty and Environment
WRC	Women's Rights and Citizenship

## 2. THE RATIONALE, BENEFITS AND RISKS OF USING COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESSES

What has IDRC learned about why and when to use competitive grants processes? This section outlines IDRC's policy and practice regarding competitive grants processes. It lays out the main benefits and risks associated with the modality. IDRC evaluations show that the assumed benefits of CGPs may not always apply, and that IDRC staff have to assess the tensions and trade-offs that come with the modality.

Finally, this section notes that IDRC's mandate and approach influences the way it uses competitive processes. By specifying competition criteria, IDRC defines to greater or lesser degrees who can apply for the competition. For example, it adds assessment criteria (like commitment to development principles) beyond those that might be strictly necessary for the research topic. Given the Centre's peer-to-peer approach to learning, IDRC often intervenes to support awardees' research processes in ways that might not be common in more hands-off competitions. So staff might consider: what elements of a competitive grants process ought to be competitive, or what degree of competition does and should IDRC promote?

What is IDRC's policy and practice about using competitive grants processes?

- a. What are the benefits of using CGPs?
- b. What are the risks?
- c. What questions does IDRC's experience pose about the assumed benefits of competitive processes?
- d. What elements of competitive grants processes ought to be competitive, or what degree of competition does and should IDRC promote?

### 2A. WHAT IS IDRC'S POLICY AND PRACTICE ABOUT USING COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

IDRC's Corporate Strategy and Program Framework for 2005-2010 discusses competitive grants, fellowships and awards in paragraph 126. The document states that it expects an increased emphasis on these program modalities:

Competitive grants mechanisms are a useful complement to more capacity-building focused activities (though the two are not mutually exclusive.) Although setting them up is labour-intensive, once established they have the potential to achieve several goals, often simultaneously. Most of these programs have the added advantage of being easily expandable, in size and scope, with relatively few labour inputs (the flip side of having high start-up costs.) This makes partnering possible at various stages of the process. These include:

- training and capacity building in a new methodology;
- raising visibility for a niche development issue;
- network creation;
- raising visibility for IDRC's work;
- bringing scholars and practitioners of international calibre into the Centre's orbit...
- systematizing the process of grants allocation and making it more transparent. (IDRC 2005, paragraph 126)

Bernard's review of IDRC evaluations found that in IDRC,

... competitive grants tend to be relatively short-term (3-5 years) projects, components of larger Centre policy or programme priority areas, and aimed specifically at achieving a number of forward-looking objectives<sup>1</sup>. In general they are intended to:

- *Explore* novel research themes;
- *Test* emerging research methodologies;
- *"Scope out"* prospective partnership or recipient bases;
- *Enhance* the policy influence of development issues; and/or
- *Recognize* and promote research excellence.

Bernard found that, "It is not clear that there was ever a single specific policy decision to move in the direction of competitive grants. Like much of the Centre's experience with innovation, the modality appears, more or less, to have evolved in response to changes in the development funding environment in Canada and among donors; and in the research and development environments of the regions and countries in which the Centre works." (2007, p.3)

On the other hand, competitive grants processes tend not to be appropriate for initiatives that aim to support infrastructure or institutional development.

## 2B. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING CGPs?

IDRC programs have found that CGPs can have benefits for the Centre, as well as for applicants and recipients.

### **BENEFITS FOR IDRC**

IDRC staff have used competitive grants to capitalize on the following benefits:

- **Frame a new program area** by means of a concept paper and call for proposals on a particular research theme. This allows an organization like IDRC to:
  - Enter an unfamiliar field of research
  - Exercise leadership and encourage a research field to move in a particular direction
  - Introduce, promote and strengthen new methodologies
  - Invest in cutting edge, innovative and/or experimental research
  - Standardize proposals and set up means to select among them (Ford Foundation, p.3,4).
- **Attract new researchers, recipients, and partners**
  - Bring new people and ideas into IDRC's orbit
  - Expand IDRC's influence to new research environments.
- **Discover the state-of-the-art research** in a field that is new to IDRC by seeing what comes in to the call for proposals.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that, to considerable degree, these are similar to those objectives indicated on the Grants Projects in IDRC website as pertinent to grants in general.

- Capitalize on the **flexibility** of CGPs by setting up a program with a “series of project and project-related activities strung together under the umbrella of a typically fairly broad statement of purpose” (Bernard 2007).
- Once the parameters of a competitive grants process are set up, it is **relatively easy to run the grant competition a second or third time**. This can be a way of “scaling out” a research program to different geographic areas, in evolving thematic priorities, or in order to generate enough research to move toward “scaling up” findings into generalized lessons.<sup>2</sup> (Tillman p.7) An example of this is Women’s Rights and Citizenship’s (WRC) decentralization competition.
- Because the funding amounts tend to be smaller than other IDRC grants, CGPs can **minimize risk** when exploring new areas of research and partnership. (Tillman p.15)
- **CGPs can allow IDRC to devolve aspects of project management to other institutions:**
  - IDRC can contract with an external grants manager to manage the competition. External grants managers have had varying levels of responsibility for grants administration and substantive control over the theme, program design and implementation.
  - Some competitions have been spun off to other organizations.

## **BENEFITS FOR APPLICANTS AND RECIPIENTS**

CGPs can also be beneficial for applicants and recipients.

- IDRC feedback and support to proposal development can **allow applicants to strengthen their research ideas and plans**. Even if the applicants are unsuccessful in the competition, the feedback can render them more likely to receive funding from other donors, or from other parts of IDRC.
- Recipients can use their success in the CGP to **leverage their grants to mobilize additional resources from other funding sources**.
- Competitive grants can be designed to allow **recipients to benefit from networking with each other**. They can “exchange ideas and knowledge generated from the research, share research proposal development and implementation experience, and further elaborate the theme and/or methods being introduced and tested through the CG mechanism.” (Bernard 2007, p.7)

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<sup>2</sup> Tillman 2007: ... The notion of scaling up was often mentioned [with respect to 12 closing the loop of research activities]. One respondent, however, commented that scaling up is usually thought of as applying lessons learned, generalizing from experience(s). He prefers to think of the CBNRM work in Asia as scaling out: replicating cases rather than generalizing from them. SG [small grant] activities are too small, provide too little information, or data that are too particular to be generalized credibly or reliably. The work must therefore be repeated, duplicated a number of times before any general conclusions can be drawn. (p.7)

## 2C. WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Competitive grants processes can entail risks for both applicants and IDRC. The following list of risks arises from IDRC's experience as well as from that of other grant makers distilled in the Ford Foundation's publication, GrantCraft:

- The **cost of rejection** can be too high for applicants. This might be because applicants could lose credibility if they fail to win a highly publicized competition. It might also be too high a cost for IDRC, if rejecting applicants might damage its reputation for collaboration.
- The **size of the grant or the odds of winning can be too low** to justify the applicants' time, effort, and cost to submit a proposal. This is especially important if there are few other funders who might support the "losing" proposals.
- The **cost of managing the competition can be too high** for the donor in terms of funds, effort and time, in light of the funds available and the potential benefits of the program.
- When entering a new field, it can be **too difficult to identify relevant criteria for selecting winning proposals**.
- IDRC's experience shows that "competitive grants **may also create competing and potentially dysfunctional dynamics**". Among these:
  - Even though the Centre might assume that "competitions will run themselves" once the initial framework is in place, managing CGPs has required more time and effort than anticipated.
  - IDRC's mandates for capacity building, partnership, and the utilization of research results can clash with the hands-off or collegial management style competition winners might expect.
  - IDRC exerts ownership in that they define the call for proposals and parameters of the competition. However, the Centre assumes that applicants own their proposal and that it fits within the mandate and interests of their organization. At the same time, "when they win, CGPrecipients are less in partnership with IDRC than in an earned contractual relationship with it." (Bernard 2007, p.57)
  - It can be difficult to deal with poor performance within a competition. If IDRC intervenes to support a grantee, it could create imbalances and tensions for other grantees and others who were unsuccessful in the competition. (Bernard 2007, p.8)
- Competitive grants are "**catalytic rather than durable**" (Bernard 2007, p.58). They are often too small and specific to produce results that can be scaled up into lessons learned and generalizable findings (Tillman 2006). Competitive grants processes are themselves **not appropriate mechanisms to support complex, iterative and long-term research agendas**. However, they can create opportunities to fund new and exploratory research that can be followed-up with more in-depth work through other program modalities.

- In one instance, an IDRC project that funded research through a competitive process was criticized as lacking “intellectual leadership” and that the projects funded failed to cover the most important aspects of the research problematique originally defined.
- The winners of competitions may be previously unknown to IDRC. This can be beneficial in widening IDRC’s set of contacts. However, this can be a risk in that IDRC will have **“less opportunity to get to know researchers and their institutions prior to granting an award,”** and less influence over the research proposals and their execution. Compensating for this risk, if it is possible to do so at all, requires a great deal of time and effort on the part of the responsible officers—which partly undermines the notion that competitions offer especially good value for time/money, requiring a lot of work at the outset, but less once the projects are underway.” (MacLean 2007) **Setting up institutional relationships with new grantees can also take a lot of time and work.**

## 2D. WHAT QUESTIONS DOES IDRC’S EXPERIENCE POSE ABOUT THE ASSUMPTIONS OF COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESSES?

IDRC experience has brought into question several assumed benefits of competitive grant processes. Evaluators have suggested that the assumptions may be false, or at least require a lot of planning and effort to bear out in practice. Click on any of them to read more...

- *Competitive grant processes are less labour intensive than regular projects.* In fact, setting up and managing competitive grants processes takes a lot of time and effort by IDRC staff. Competitions merely require different kinds of work, and at different stages of a program, than do other IDRC grants. It may be that second and subsequent rounds of competitions might be less labour intensive, if staff can reuse previous models.
- *Competitive grant processes are more open and transparent than other program modalities.* Competitions set out clear and objectively verifiable criteria on which applications will be assessed. However, differences in research environments, capacities, countries and/or regions means that the criteria are not brought to bear on a level playing field.

### FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...

Bernard’s 2006 review of IDRC CG evaluations found that **“Competitive grant projects regularly struggle under the weight of too many and too substantial “intended outcomes” resting on too fragile a base.** More often perhaps a function of enthusiastic marketing rather than explicit design competitive grants are loosely-coupled arrangements, providing relatively few material resources and fewer technical inputs, over a usually short time horizon, to a relatively few people unconnected to IDRC or to each other in any reinforcing way. By setting the bar too high, these expectations then often to produce either overly negative reports of “missed” results; or overly positive ones full of unsubstantiated “satisfaction” statements. Neither situation assesses the project fairly on the basis of what it could and did do.” (Evaluation Highlight #8)

- *Competitive grants promote collaboration and networking.* Competitive grants processes may include learning events to review proposals, collaborate on research processes, or review findings, or co-publish results. If these events lack the right “hooks” to generate collaboration or provide the right kinds of mutual benefit, networking will fail. Moreover, if applicants see themselves as in competition for scarce funds, they might be more likely to guard their intellectual property than to collaborate and seek to improve others’ proposals.
- *A call for proposals is a good way of determining the state of the art in a research area.* Competitions can draw out interesting new partners and project ideas, but not all key actors in a research field will reply to a call for proposals.
- *A call for proposals is a good way to attract new actors to IDRC research areas.* Strategies that seem to attract new researchers include choosing an external grants manager who is well-connected with relevant research communities, accepting proposals over a long period of time, and keeping initial application requirements minimal. On the other hand, if the call for proposals and application process is not well publicized, too complicated, or if the grants are small, it might fail to attract new researchers. Competitive Grants processes can result in policy influence because IDRC is selecting the best proposals by the best researchers who will be able to achieve policy outcomes. However, CGPs tend to work best as short term funding and policy influence can require longer term investments. Moreover, researchers may hesitate to pave the way toward policy influence by including key policy makers and affected communities in proposal development when they are not sure whether their proposal will be funded.

## 2E. WHAT ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES OUGHT TO BE COMPETITIVE OR WHAT DEGREE OF COMPETITION DOES AND SHOULD IDRC PROMOTE?

IDRC structures competitive grants processes to achieve the overall goals of the Centre and the specific program objectives. Centre staff design competitions with criteria for who can apply, with standards regarding development priorities and research ethics, and with measures to support capacity development in awardees. IDRC acknowledges that different research, development, institutional and policy contexts will affect the proposals coming from different countries or regions. Centre staff sometimes adapt selection criteria to allow for those differences or visit applicants and work with them on their proposals prior to selecting winners. IDRC practice does not tend toward setting up a completely “open” competition, and leaving research processes to unfold without monitoring and supporting research teams.

IDRC’s past experience shows that staff are willing to put aside strict definitions of “competitiveness” to allow for a more “developmental” approach within its competitions. Staff just need to be clear and explicit about how competitions further their program and institutional priorities, and how “developmental” interventions will affect the competition in appearance, substance, and outcomes.

It might be more helpful to ask **what elements of this grant program will be competitive and to what degree will the Centre allow hands-off competitive processes to determine the substance and results of the program?**

- How will selection criteria, how will IDRC shape the applicant pool?
- How many layers of criteria and priorities will the program as a whole and applicants as individuals have to address in order to be eligible for funding (e.g., geographic coverage, gender and environmental priorities, inter-institutional collaborations)?
- How will criteria be prioritized when assessing proposals?
- Who has a say in the selection process, when, and with what degree of consultative versus deliberative voice?
- How much support and capacity development will the program include?
- How will the Centre account for differences in research contexts?
- How much tailoring and intervening will the Centre undertake to ensure research proceeds as planned and produces expected results?

IDRC programs that use competitive grants processes tend to balance this modality with other elements that are not competitive. For instance, some programs use competitions to bring in new research topics and actors, and then fund a second phase of the most promising research through non-competitive grants. In this way, the CGP is used as an incubator. Other competitions grant funds to applicants on a broad research theme, but then commission specific papers to build on emergent findings. The Centre sometimes invites grantees to pool their research for joint publications, or work on joint dissemination or utilization strategies. IDRC's experience shows many possibilities. Broadly speaking, Bernard counsels IDRC staff to critically analyze the design of competitive arrangements to ensure that time, resources, activities and other inputs link systematically to the anticipated results of the program, and the assumed benefits of using competitions as opposed to traditional program mechanisms.

### 3. ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

IDRC staff tailor competitive grants processes to the research contexts, themes, opportunities and constraints they face.

However, there are common elements to competitive grants processes throughout IDRC. Each CGP includes decisions regarding:

- a. Duration, Size and Number of Rounds of Competition
- b. Geography
- c. Calls for Proposals and Application Processes
- d. Expanding IDRC's networks through competitive grants
- e. Using External Advisors
- f. Managing Competitive Grants Processes: in-house or external grants managers?
- g. Number of Grantees and Number of Rounds of Competition
- h. Monitoring and Supporting Grantees
- i. Working with Runners Up



### 3A. THE DURATION, SIZE AND NUMBER OF ROUNDS OF COMPETITION

IDRC has experience running competitive grant processes with various durations, sizes and geographic scopes.

#### **DURATION AND SIZE**

IDRC's CGPs have tended to be short term. Funding is generally for one or two years. This is in keeping with the finding that competitive grants processes are intended to "complement, extend or reinforce" IDRC's core activities in supporting development research.

When IDRC programs decide on the duration and size of grants, they assess:

- what kind of science is involved,
- what kinds and quality of supports will be required for the research environments and purposes of the research,
- what levels and types of capacities exist among grantees, advisors and managers, and
- what human and financial resources are available both from IDRC, as well as other donor and local partners.

Evaluation reports show that the size of grants awarded through competitive processes at IDRC have ranged from \$30,000 to over \$200,000. As the modality continues to develop and be adapted the size of grants has increased.

#### **FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...**

Deciding grant duration and size:  
A CG whose purpose was to define the main issues for women regarding decentralized social policy initially offered projects of \$100,000 for 18-24 months. However, this was eventually deemed insufficient when "the scope of the field became better defined; researchers established their theoretical and methodological feet; and options for policy influence began to open up." Similarly, one expert suggested that awarding \$150,000 for 24 months was "untenable" to undertake EcoHealth research on malarial control, unless IDRC promised to fund additional phases of research. (Bernard 2007 p.18)

#### **NUMBER OF ROUNDS OF COMPETITION**

Some IDRC competitions are held for a single round. From there, some PIs have followed-up on some of the research themes, methodologies, or findings from the competition into larger and longer term research initiatives that follow more of a "traditional" grant development process.

Other CGPs "scale out" by running a competition a second time with a different theme, or in a different region. As pointed out in the CSPF, CGPs "have the added advantage of being easily expandable, in size and scope, with relatively few labour inputs (the flip side of having high start-up costs.)"

### 3B. THE GEOGRAPHY OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS

Regarding geography, IDRC's experience suggests that smaller is better.

With respect both to the numbers of grants awarded and their geographic spread, "less rather than more" is a good principle to follow. It allows better tailoring for, and within, diversity; more direct and frequent exchanges among grantees, and between them and IDRC or advisors; and the potential of mobilizing policy and/or applying results to specific practice situations. (Bernard 2007 p.16)

Deciding on the geographic reach of a competition will depend on both substantive issues and matters of logistics and administration.

#### **FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...**

##### **AN INTRA-REGIONAL COMPETITION**

Decentralization and Women's Rights offered regionally-tailored grants projects under a conceptual umbrella. Organized in SARO, LACRO and SSA, the goals of each project were similar enough to generate a body of comparable knowledge. For example: to generate and support research on policy and conceptual linkages document and analyze specific reforms assist in strengthening the community of practice of researchers contribute to the systematic gathering of knowledge encourage the formulation of evidence-based policy recommendations. At the same time, they were broad enough to allow for each region to be funded and managed independently, with localized tailoring of specific questions, data sets and sources, and the interpretation of results with/for specific user communities.

Substantive issues (Relevance):

- Which geographic frame or perspective will allow for the most complete, accurate and applicable outcomes in terms of intended changes in knowledge, research methodology and capacity, policy and development practice?
- Does this perspective have to be simultaneously arrived at by a range of researchers (an assumption of the CG modality) to realize the benefit?

Logistic and administrative issues (appropriateness):

- What kind of design, management arrangement, human resource base and financial commitment are the most likely to realize intended results?
- How can these be provided in the most cost-effective way?

#### **FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...**

##### **MOVING FROM GLOBAL TO REGIONAL COMPETITIONS**

An evaluation of RoKS concluded that after three global competitions, the program should move to regional competitions. RoKS could then capitalize on five advantages:

1. The competitions could have a sharper focus on regional priorities.
2. Screening and selecting proposals might be easier if there was more coherence among the submissions.
3. The awardees would have more in common and might be more likely to take advantage of the networking opportunities that are presented.
4. It might be a way to build on past RoKS awardees in the regions both to help identify themes and perhaps serve as referees or resource persons for future projects.
5. Regional Offices could help identify themes and become more involved in the projects and the dissemination and promotion of project results. (Graham 2006, p.7)

Tillman (2006, p.8) reported that CBNRM used competitions in Latin America, but not in Asia. He explains, “in the poorest regions of Asia, with weak institutions and researchers with weak English language skills, who are not familiar with interdisciplinary and participatory research, and whose scientific tradition is separate from Western science, CBNRM grants programs are non-competitive. By contrast, in Latin America, CBNRM works with well-established institutions and introduces new ideas in a competitive model because researchers there by and large are familiar with and competent in the standards and methodologies of Western science.”

### 3C. CALLING FOR AND SELECTING PROPOSALS

In calling for proposals, IDRC competitive grants use several stages and various models:

- Scoping out prospective projects and partnerships
- Developing a research theme and issuing a call for proposals
- Commissioning a concept paper
- Deciding who can apply
- Designing application stages
- Determining selection processes

In each phase, IDRC has found it imperative to delineate clear roles, authority and responsibility of the Centre, external advisors, and external grants managers.

#### **SCOPING OUT PROSPECTIVE PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS**

In developing competitive processes, IDRC POs have started by “scoping out” a field or region. They check out gaps in research themes, and investigate potential programs and partnerships.

Based on this scoping, POs might do one of three things:

- circulate a call for proposals in a region, or to selected organizations and institutions;
- negotiate with potential partners and potential EGMs to develop the details of the CG, or
- invite teams of researchers to submit preliminary proposals that will be considered in a workshop setting. (Tillman 2006, p.4,5)

#### **DEVELOPING A RESEARCH THEME**

In competitive arrangements, IDRC defines a research theme and invites proposals to address that theme. This puts IDRC in the “driver’s seat” in setting the agenda, more so than in traditional projects which IDRC develops in conjunction with partners. Bernard contends,

“ Most, if not all, competitive grants are formulated inside IDRC, on the basis of the specific analysis of gaps and opportunities in the global development and development research agenda. It is critical to keep in mind as a principal determiner of the strengths and challenges of the modality, that competitive grants are not responsive. Experience in the Centre suggests that they are rarely the products of developing country researchers or institutions independently submitting proposals or working with Centre officers to generate them.

That said, while the general substance of the research theme or question of the grant may, in this respect, be straightforward, the range and depth of perspective considered necessary to explore or respond to it sufficiently is often much less clear. Uncertainty about what is “out there” by way of knowledge and practice is, typically, the justification for the competitive modality in the first place and its major challenge. In this sense, the modality is a comparatively resource and time intense approach to exploring the unknown.” (Bernard 2007 p.13)

### COMMISSIONING A CONCEPT PAPER

IDRC staff have often tested their research topic informally with external experts to determine its relevance and potential scope. In addition, many competitive grants use a concept paper to help formulate the dimensions of research gaps and questions. These concept papers are:

- designed and undertaken expressly as a tool for anchoring the competitive grant on firm and feasible theoretical ground,
- guided by a broad enough terms of reference to generate innovative thinking,
- coherently, objectively and competently done, and
- systematically used by IDRC.

### BALANCING ISSUES OF WHO CAN APPLY

In deciding who can apply to a competition, IDRC balances

The benefits of widening IDRC's networks of new researchers partners	&	the risks of working with new researchers and institutions
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In addition, IDRC balances:

Running an open and transparent competition	&	setting boundaries to ensure quality and adherence to IDRC's mandate and approach.
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“...Concept papers can also be effective in catalyzing interest and framing an initial applicant base where they are undertaken with input from, and circulated through, relevant – and perhaps less traditionally “relevant” – policy, academic, research and donor networks... [These] papers can help ensure that candidates come to the table with a good sense of the ‘why and where to’ of the initiative, ensuring an end product that is reasonably consistent with both their own and IDRC’s motivating purposes of the grant.” (Bernard 2007, p.14)

### DETERMINING WHO CAN APPLY

Decisions of who is able to apply for a competitive grant hinge on relevance to the theme, appropriateness to the design and management resources available, and the professional qualifications required. The following questions flesh out these criteria.

#### RELEVANCE:

- What sector, disciplinary and geographic expertise are most relevant to the CG’s development and research goals?
- Will grantees be expected to stay completely within the theoretical or methodological framework of the CG? Will they be able to adapt to local conditions, user demands or emerging findings? How hard will it be to adapt and be flexible while still maintaining a coherent CGP?

## **APPROPRIATENESS:**

- Should grantees be teams of collaborating researchers, established networks or institutions? What difference will this make for assigning responsibility for quality, focus, and adherence to the CGP requirements?
- What are the cost and work implications for the different types of recipients?

## **PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE AND STANDARDS:**

- What levels of expertise are necessary with respect to academic credibility, research expertise, language ability, and experience in preparing reports?
- What professional standards are applicable – e.g., academic ethics, sustainability, ability to adapt, willingness to collaborate?

As discussed in the section on the benefits and risks of competitive grants processes, some IDRC programs use competitions to widen their pool of contacts. Deciding who is able to apply in a competition balances the benefits of widening IDRC's network of contacts with the risks associated with working with previously unknown researchers and institutions. The level of risk can increase if coupled with the expectation for a hands-off management style once awards are granted. Decisions regarding who is able to apply also balance the impetus to offering a fully open and transparent competition with a need to set up boundaries to ensure quality, compatibility, and an adherence to IDRC's mandate and approach.

## **THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS**

IDRC's experience suggests that using existing channels of IDRC partners and networks might be the best way to ensure that the Centre gets a manageable number of relevant and appropriate applications. Organizations already connected to IDRC can spread word of the competition to others in their networks and so widen the Centre's range of contacts. At the same time, using existing channels will hopefully avoid the exhausting task faced by one program which had to select 4 winners out of 78 proposals.

IDRC has also found that publicizing clear selection criteria makes the CGP easier to manage. The criteria can limit the range of proposals received and stream-line the review process. Moreover, the research eventually funded will be more likely to generate complementary findings, synthesize outcomes, and produce a coherent "storyline" of the grant program (Bernard 2007, p.36).

## **DESIGNING APPLICATION STAGES**

IDRC programs have opted for application processes that range from expressions of interest, to short concept notes, or to fully detailed proposals. The RoKS evaluation suggested that it would be best to have a multi-stage process that reduces the time and effort for everyone involved in the application and selection process. In some competitions, IDRC has used multi-stage application processes to get to know new researchers and organizations before committing to funding. After short-listing candidates, the Centre has done site-visits to the organizations, invited them to orientation workshops, and/or provided seed-funding to develop their proposals further. These steps can minimize the risks of broadening IDRC's connections to first-time research partners.

In designing application procedures, Graham suggests that RoKS asks the following question in order to minimize the work for everyone involved in the initial application and selection stages: “What is the minimum information needed to make a decision as to whether a project idea falls within RoKS criteria and is worth pursuing further?” (Graham 2007 p.9)

Further, the evaluation asked whether the RoKS application form and guidelines were better than just asking applicants to fill out IDRC’s regular funding information and guidelines required to prepare MGCs. In other words, application forms and guidelines should add value or bring something new to the process.

Some of IDRC’s CGPs include proposal development and peer review workshops within the application process. IDRC has learned to recognize the value, but also the limitations, of such events. These can be of value in strengthening participants’ research plans. They can be opportunities for collaboration and networking. They can increase the transparency of selection processes. However, peers can perceive themselves as competitors for funding. As such, they may not be neutral in their assessment of others’ proposals. They might hesitate to share their research plans or intellectual property. In order to handle these potential problems, IDRC has explicitly acknowledged the concerns up-front, and has asked workshop participants to provide written explanations for their decisions. (Bernard 2007, p.38)

#### **DETERMINING SELECTION PROCESSES**

Selection processes in IDRC CGPs vary in terms of the roles and timing of input from IDRC, external committees/juries, and external grants managers (EGM). Processes also depend on who has consultative versus deliberative voice in decision-making. Many variations exist, depending on what kind of expertise is most appropriate at each stage of the selection process. In some cases, IDRC does the first screening of proposals, and allows a jury of internal and external reviewers to decide which proposals will receive funding. In other CGPs, IDRC asks for recommendations from external juries, but reserves the right to make final selections. Sometimes the EGM sends IDRC all proposals that meet basic criteria, while in other cases, the EGM has an important voice over the final selection.

IDRC selects proposals for their technical merit and other research-relevant criteria. However, with its development mandate, the Centre also assesses applicants’ philosophies of development, their relationships to relevant communities, their institutional priorities, and other aspects related to ODA accountability. Here again, the Centre balances the evidence written in the proposal with a more subtle analysis of the applicants’ priorities and character.

IDRC has found that selection processes run best when they have clear, simple, unambiguous and fair rules and systems.

### 3D. EXPANDING IDRC'S NETWORKS THROUGH COMPETITIVE GRANTS

IDRC has had success in using competitive grants to bring in new researchers and organizations into its program areas. Both IDRC and grantees have benefited from the new connections.

- Strategies to expand IDRC's contacts through competitive grants processes
- Risks and challenges associated with working with new partners
- What about those who do not win?

#### **STRATEGIES TO EXPAND IDRC'S CONTACTS THROUGH COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES**

Strategies to expand IDRC's contacts will depend on how broadly IDRC wishes to cast its net, how many grants the CGP intends to support, and who manages the competition. Some options to either limit or expand the potential applicant pool include:

- Asking members of relevant existing IDRC networks to forward the call for proposals on to others in their circles might be sufficient to expand IDRC's connections and keep the number of applications manageable.
- Choosing an external grants manager on the basis of their connections, or potential to connect, to appropriate applicants.
- Targeting the call for proposals to selected networks or institutions versus broadly publicizing the competition.
- Instituting a short versus long time-frame in which IDRC will receive proposals.
- Allowing for proposals in only two languages versus several languages.
- Setting up detailed proposal requirements versus simple indications of interest.

#### **RISKS AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH WORKING WITH NEW PARTNERS**

Working with new researchers, organizations and networks can pose some risks and challenges. IDRC will not have the same familiarity with these actors, and may be less able to gauge their capacity, their approach, their commitment to development and research ethics, and other "soft" but crucial elements that can affect working relationships. IDRC might try to get to know organizations better by doing site visits or pre-selection workshops. However, if these measures only include short-listed applicants, they might be seen as being unfair to those who do not make the first cut.

The RoKS evaluation explained in some detail how introducing new institutions to IDRC also entails significant additional administrative workload. In order to prepare an MGC for over \$100,000 for a first-time recipient of IDRC funding, institutions must file risk assessments. This includes corporate documents, audited financial reports, a questionnaire, and sometimes additional budget notes. If winning proposals feature inter-institutional collaborations, risk assessments might be required for all participating organizations. This is labour intensive, and can take up to 6 months. The work is compounded if several grants must be approved at the same time. Administrative or research delays in individual projects can complicate the timing of joint events. It can create problems of "lagging equity" – where a PI's grant money cannot be spent as planned within the fiscal year. The evaluation therefore advised that, "the project approval document (PAD) for the entire competition be considerably longer than the duration of the longest anticipated project to avoid the need for time extensions." (Graham 2007 p.12,13)

When using an external grants manager, IDRC may face the challenge of how to develop strong relationships with new partners if it is not the primary point of contact with awardees.

### **WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO DO NOT WIN?**

The call for proposals may attract applications from researchers and organizations who were previously unknown to IDRC. However, competitions often result in rejecting applications. This can alienate the new-to-IDRC researchers. In some research and institutional environments, the opportunity cost of developing proposals can be high. If the organization had to consult with policy makers, or other collaborating or user communities to produce the proposal, being rejected can be bad for their reputation. An unsuccessful competition can leave an organization weaker for having dedicated time and resources to developing the proposal. IDRC therefore has tried to find ways of working with those who do not win, and maintaining positive relations with them. Some strategies have been:

- Working with “runners up” to strengthen their proposals for future rounds of competition (though IDRC can rarely guarantee that a competition will be held for a subsequent round, and this kind of support could call into question the impartiality of the next selection process).
- Seeking other funding opportunities for runners up (though IDRC has had little success in finding other donors for such proposals).
- Including runners up in workshops and dissemination events from the competition.
- Involving them in communications and networking opportunities that arise from the CGP.

## **3E. USING EXTERNAL ADVISORS**

Because they tend to be exploratory, “scoping out” initiatives, testing novel methodologies and new thematic areas, IDRC’s competitive grants processes rely on the assistance of external experts. IDRC has learned from both positive and not-so-positive experiences with external advisors. As Bernard found, “While straightforward in theory, appointing and maintaining these resources as active and functional parts of the CGP process is invariably a major challenge” (2007, p.30).

- How IDRC has used external advisors
- Who does IDRC ask to be external advisors
- What IDRC has learned about using external advisors

### **HOW IDRC HAS USED EXTERNAL ADVISORS IN CGPs**

IDRC has asked external advisors to:

- conceptualize the CGP overall
- help identify research gaps to be addressed in the competition
- develop concept papers
- review and help select winning proposals
- mentor researchers
- help identify opportunities for research utilization networking and policy influence
- mobilize additional funding.



## WHO DOES IDRC ASK TO BE EXTERNAL ADVISORS?

In IDRC's experience, the best external advisors balance scientific rigor with an understanding of the constraints faced by those doing research in developing countries. They take initiative in providing opinions, asking questions, and working collaboratively with IDRC, the EGM and grantees. They contribute to the program for less money and credit that they might otherwise expect. IDRC has drawn external advisors from universities, previous partner organizations, external grants managers, other donors, and NGOs.

## WHAT IDRC HAS LEARNED ABOUT USING EXTERNAL ADVISORS?

IDRC's experience reveals three lessons in using external resource people. First, "smaller is better". Second, clarifying roles, procedures and feedback up-front is crucial. Third, IDRC must acknowledge and support the contributions of external advisors.

### 1. SMALLER IS BETTER.

- Limit the number of resource people. CGPs with too many people with too many perspectives require too much time, come up with overly divergent guidance, and reduce consistency for the CGP.
- The depth and immediate relevance of advisors' experience is more important than the breadth and variety of their technical advice and support. Grantees have benefited greatly from personalized feedback that is offered systematically and with clear direction.
- Limit the terms of reference for resource people.
  - IDRC has found that it works best to mobilize external resource people for limited and specific tasks. These must be tailored to the needs of the CGP, and the abilities and constraints of the resource people.
  - It has not worked to leave external advisors to initiate actions on their own. One project hoped that the senior scientists in its advisory committee would guide research and mobilize additional funding for the project. However, without sufficient guidance from the Centre, the committee "lost track of their role and the project, contributed little and were left frustrated." (Bernard 2007, p.32)

#### FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS... HOW MANY ADVISORS TO USE

RoKs found that ten people doing proposal review was "excessive". An evaluation recommended limiting this to only five people. Two IDRC staff (one PO, one GAD) could initially determine whether the proposal is within the CG theme, and decide what administrative information would be needed from the applicant. Then, IDRC could ask three subject experts, either from within the Centre or outside experts, to judge the merits of the proposals. The evaluation suggested that the CG advisory committee should focus more on overall program design than on proposal selection. (Graham 2006 p.8-9)

## **2. CLARIFY ROLES, PROCEDURES, AND FEEDBACK UP-FRONT.**

- IDRC needs to balance advisors' roles between being judges for applicant selection, and mentors to the grantees funded through the competition.
- CGPs proceed more smoothly when advisors understand the program and IDRC well. It has helped to create as much face-to-face time as possible between advisors and IDRC, the EGM and grantees. This is true for those new to IDRC, as well as to advisors who might already be familiar with (parts of) IDRC. Understandings cannot be assumed.
- CGPs need to develop collaborative mechanisms to deal with communication, conflict, and under-performance before problems arise.
- Grantees have benefited when advisors provide written feedback on applications and drafts. When reviews and assessment scales are quantitative, written explanations have also helped uncover differences in rating criteria among advisors.
- IDRC has learned to welcome advisors' feedback in their assigned roles, but also on the CGP as a whole.

## **3. IDRC MUST ACKNOWLEDGE AND SUPPORT THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF EXTERNAL ADVISORS.**

- The Centre has learned to acknowledge, respect and accommodate the value-added and in-kind costs of the experts' contributions.
- It does not work to under-budget travel costs and fees, or expect people to piggy back their contributions on other work. Advisors will not be able to devote sufficient time and attention to activities if they are always add-ons to already full schedules.

## **3F. MANAGING COMPETITIVE GRANT PROCESS: IN HOUSE OR EXTERNAL GRANTS MANAGER?**

Competitions can either be run "in house" by IDRC staff, or by an "external grants manager" (EGM). When IDRC manages a competition in house, it maintains close connections with awardees and their research, and ensures the IDRC brand is directly connected with the competition and its results. On the other hand, outsourcing can be preferable if an EGM can improve the project's reach to local actors, and decrease costs. Outsourcing may be a good opportunity for IDRC to reinforce and build the capacity of southern institutions to manage complex research programs. However, the Centre does not have a policy on when to manage CGPs in house or via EGMs. In some cases, smaller grants might be managed externally. In others, the decision will hinge on other assessments of the benefits and risks discussed below.

In the final analysis, evaluations conclude that managing a CGP through an EGM does not necessarily require less work – it may merely require different work by IDRC staff. As Bernard concluded, the question of opting to use an EGM as opposed to managing a CGP in-house is really more one of "how extensive and intensive should be the external resources IDRC brings into its own management responsibility". (2007, p.27)

This section outlines some benefits and risks of managing competitions in-house and by external grants managers.

## MANAGING A COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESS IN HOUSE

### BENEFITS

Bernard identified 7 advantages to keeping the management of competitive grants processes inside IDRC (2007, p.21):

1. keeping IDRC's mandate and the CG's priorities and expectations consistent;
2. ensuring that decisions as to CGP oversight, adaptation and termination are directly grounded in Centre policy, programming and budget parameters;
3. maintaining, and presumably extending, IDRC's profile in the issues of the CG;
4. providing the Centre direct access to the new institutions targeted by the CG;
5. giving opportunity for a more direct relationship between the Centre and recipients, with greater potential for learning on both sides: for IDRC on the process of complex grant making and for grantees from the Centre's technical assistance;
6. allowing the easier and earlier "sorting through" of problems as they emerge; and
7. limiting the kinds of inconsistent or contentious relations with CGPgrantees that can crop up while working through a third party intermediary.

Deciding on whether to keep CGP management within IDRC can depend on how much of a PI's program is handled through the competition. For example, an evaluation of RoKS pointed out that its CGP was an integral part of the RoKS portfolio. As such, it made sense for the PI to manage the competition directly. The evaluation suggested that if other funding modes became more prominent within RoKS, then it might make sense to get another organization to manage the competition.

### RISKS

IDRC staff have pointed out these disadvantages to running a competitive grants process in-house:

- CGPs can take too much time and effort for IDRC staff. Many aspects of CGPs might be performed better, more cheaply, and more efficiently by a third party.
- Competitions might seem to lack objectivity and transparency when IDRC is the sole or primary judge of which application gets funding.
- IDRC's management can be more light-handed when intermediated by a third party, and this may be more appropriate for the high-capacity researchers who win competitions.

### MITIGATING THE RISKS

Bernard's assessment is that in-house management can work well for the Centre's purposes, so long as:

- staff expect different kinds of work - as opposed to less work – as what they might expect if the CGP was administered by an external grants manager. This will require appropriate staffing (perhaps the time of a PO, a contracted PDA, or an intern), and resources for travel and communication.
- IDRC is clear that it will not assume a "neutral" position in how the competition unfolds, whether it manages the CGP in-house or via an EGM.
- IDRC puts in place an appropriate professional support relationship with awardees, perhaps through a mix of selection committees, advisory panels, and/or mentors who are guided by a clear set of ToRs.

## **WORKING THROUGH EXTERNAL GRANTS MANAGERS (EGMs)**

According to Bernard's review, "Increasingly, it appears, IDRC no longer sees itself as the manager of choice ... the preference to outsource at least some aspects of administrative and technical responsibility to a contracted person or organization seems clear." Working with external grants managers can be a way of working toward the Centre's principle of devolving responsibility for program coordination, administration and management to institutions in the South (IDRC 2005, Part 1, para 50).

### **BENEFITS**

IDRC seeks to capitalize on several potential benefits in working with an external grants manager:

- EGMs can save IDRC staff time, work and resources. EGMs can create publicity lists, organize the call for proposals, receive proposals, assist with reviewing and selecting proposals, work through financial and administrative details, maintain communication with grantees, and organize certain functions and events.
- Outsourcing can reinforce and build the capacity of southern institutions to manage complex research projects.
- Because EGMs can do certain tasks more cheaply and efficiently, outsourcing can reduce IDRC's overheads.
- Some EGMs can mentor research teams throughout their research process.
- IDRC might choose a particular EGM because it has thematic expertise and knows regional researchers, institutions, and contexts better than IDRC. As such, it will be able to better target the call for proposals, communicate effectively with applicants, be aware of capacity issues, contribute to selection decisions, and maintain closer management of grantees' research processes.

### **RISKS**

- Several evaluations have found that using an external grants manager has not decreased IDRC time or workload requirements. Outlining roles and relationships, maintaining communication, and managing the EGM also takes a lot of time. In fact, IDRC's experience shows that working with EGMs can merely require different types of labour, and at different stages of the competitive grants process, than if IDRC runs the entire competition itself.
- For some programs, identifying and contracting with an EGM has also taken a lot of time. In one case, it took seven months to plan an outsourcing process, select an EGM, and finalize contract arrangements. As corporate learning and experience grow, the time required for these initial steps might decrease. However, POs involved learned that "this process takes time. Working on very tight deadlines is not always very realistic." (cited in Bernard 2007, p.24)
- Outsourcing in a Recipient Administered Project (RAP) can allow IDRC staff to lose track of the CGP and its results. As quoted in Tillman, "RAP risks your losing the content and integrating it into your programming psyche, because you are not monitoring it on a more regular basis." (Tillman 2006 p.9)
- If EGMs have the most direct contact with awardees, IDRC might miss opportunities to develop close connections with grantees who are new to IDRC funding.

- IDRC decreases its control, and is subject to the strengths and weaknesses of the EGM. This can be beneficial. However, there is a risk in that the partner might not maintain IDRC's standards or approaches. Without adequate oversight, outsourcing can diminish IDRC's influence over research quality and results.
- Outsourcing also can risk IDRC's name and reputation. Poorly run or handled competitions will reflect negatively on IDRC. On the other hand, Bernard argues, well managed competitions will not necessarily reflect well on the Centre; more likely, the credit will accrue to the EGM (Bernard 2007, p.24).
- Conflicts between IDRC and an EGM have caused confusion for grantees. In one conflict, IDRC decided to stop working with an EGM, which interrupted funding to grantees mid-way through their research.

## MITIGATING THE RISKS

IDRC evaluations recommend that IDRC clarify the roles, authority and the nature of the working relationship between the Centre and EGM. Specifically, IDRC must define:

- Will the EGM manage the entire competition, or only selected well-defined tasks?
- Is IDRC's primary intention to save time, or is it also to build the capacity of another institution to manage research? If capacity building is part of the rationale, then IDRC will need to ensure that it allocates enough time and resources to support the EGM.
- Does IDRC expect to expand its networks by using the EGM? If so, how will IDRC develop and maintain the new links?
- Is the EGM supposed to be a partner with IDRC, or a contractor? IDRC has learned from difficulties that arose when an EGM and IDRC had different understandings of their relationship. As a *partner*, IDRC and the EGM hold joint ownership over the nature and process of the entire competitive grants process. As a

### EGMs: CONTRACTOR OF PARTNER?

"The distinction between contractor and partner is likely to be neither a simple nor a minor one. IDRC sees and presents itself typically as a development/capacity building partner – and is seen that way by others in the development community. Varying that image – and the reality – will always be difficult. However, the risks involved for the Centre and for the cooperating agency are increased to the extent the lines between contracting and partnering are left unclear or become blurred through shifting patterns of behaviour during the relationship." (Bernard 2007, p.25)

- *contractor*, an EGM is a business partner who implements specific tasks within an IDRC-conceived, -articulated, and -owned project. The distinction requires spelling out the nature of the IDRC-EGM relationship as a whole, not just defining individual tasks.
- Evaluations suggest that program staff ought to work with IDRC's Grants Administration Division when they begin to think about outsourcing to an EGM. GAD staff can help design outsourcing arrangements, select an EGM, and ensure the necessary requirements will be met by EGMs.
- IDRC experience shows that POs must actively manage the manager.

- Does IDRC wish to maintain final authority over key elements of the competition, including selection of grantees, and the right to override decisions made by the EGM? If so, this should be stipulated in the contract with the EGM.
- What administrative responsibilities will IDRC retain? For example, IDRC program staff will probably have to help mobilize resources, connect project actors with other PIs and regional initiatives, and fulfil Centre requirements.

### **SELECTING AN EXTERNAL GRANTS MANAGER**

IDRC selects EGMs either by invitation or through a competitive process. IDRC experience suggests that opening competitions for EGMs might be too time-consuming and too mechanical. Competitions might not be able to account for subtle but crucial factors (such as organizational culture) that will determine the success of the working relationship between the Centre and the EGM.

The following criteria have proven important in selecting EGMs:

- Research management capacity and research capacity. If the EGM will take part in proposal selection, it would have to recognize good research design and management capacity in applications. However, research might not be a main part of its role as an EGM, and its thematic focus might not have to be connected to the CG.
- Ability to promote collaboration and networking among grantees
- Access to sources of information and potential applicants
- Funding administration capacity
- Knowledge of IDRC's ethos and mandate
- Reputation for collaboration and ethical behaviour
- Institutional stability (an organization that has other activities and funding that will support and complement - not undermine - its ability to carry out its EGM functions)
- Skills, experience, and organizational values in producing timely reports that fulfil IDRC's requirements for results-orientation and analytical approach
- Good track record of managing multi-faceted outreach programs
- Staff who have the time and resources to take on the grants management work – i.e., people who will not be expected to incorporate it as part of their regular duties.

## **3G. NUMBER OF GRANTEES AND NUMBER OF ROUNDS OF COMPETITION**

IDRC-funded competitions have awarded grants to a single winner, a couple of winners, or as many as 25 on an annual basis. The box gives some examples. Programs have funded single or multiple rounds of competitions. Deciding the number of grantees and number of rounds of competitions depends on:

- the funds available;

### **NUMBERS OF GRANTEES IN IDRC CGPs:**

The number of grantees funded in competitions varies in IDRC programs. The PCT/WRC project in Guatemala and Colombia on Gender Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies had 2 recipients. Phases 1 and 2 of RoKS each supported 6 projects. EEPSEA awarded 15 grants in 2005/06. Pan Asia's CGP supported 25.

- the rationale for the competition (is it to find someone to undertake intensive work on a specific topic? to generate several pieces of research that can be compared? to test a new methodology in a variety of research environments?); and
- whether multiple rounds are needed to deepen analysis, extend geographic reach, develop new themes, or continue to test methodologies.

### **SINGLE AWARDEES**

Some IDRC competitions have awarded funding to a single applicant. In the case of Gender Justice in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies, a single awardee was initially chosen after IDRC and its advisory committee worked with several applicants in a proposal development workshop. A second was funded subsequently.

### **MULTIPLE AWARDEES**

Offering funds to multiple applicants can be a key advantage of a competitive grants process. The Centre has had positive experiences building on the opportunities of having simultaneous projects selected and running as a group. However, there are also challenges in terms of the amount of time and effort needed to arrange and monitor multiple projects and recipients.

### **BENEFITS OF HAVING MULTIPLE AWARDEES**

Having multiple awardees can:

- enable “multiple actions on a single question through shared methodological experiences,
- realize the cost-benefit of joint workshops, training and mentoring,
- allow for joint dissemination of research findings, and
- increase opportunities for networking among recipients, advisors, donors and other stakeholders.” (Bernard 2007, p.17)

### **RISKS OF HAVING MULTIPLE AWARDEES**

- While competitive grants processes often assume that projects will run in tandem, problems for one or two grantee teams can cause delays for the entire project. Several factors can affect the pace of the implementation of awards:
  - Different institutional or researcher capacities;
  - Country clearance procedures;
  - Development research environments; and
  - Complex research designs or conceptual frameworks – e.g., participatory, community-based and/or inter-disciplinary.
- When one or two teams are out of sync with the rest of the group, the timing and focus of workshops, network coordination, and synthesis reports can be delayed. Bernard notes that “delays can also result in pressure being put on teams to stay-in-line, move too quickly, or ignore data which might lead them outside the shared competitive frame.” (Bernard 2007, p.17) Delays can also mean a PI has trouble spending their grant money within the fiscal year in which it was allocated, creating a problem of “lagging equity”.
- George Tillman warns that each individual award funded through a competition can require as much administrative work, communication and project activities as a traditional project.

## MITIGATING THE RISK OF DELAYS IN MULTI-AWARD COMPETITIONS

Bernard's 2007 review found these ways of "[building] expressly into the mechanism ways to ensure that adjustments can be made to grantee research projects in ways that protect both the individual case as well as the benefits of a multi-site programme:

- Work through potential grantee "drop-out" scenarios with respect to timing and direction; realistically assess the pliability of goals; and design for manoeuvrability through planned adaptation strategies and tools e.g. extra-budgetary allocations, advisory roles, inter-grantee exchange.
- Explore ways of negotiating issues like country clearances for the overall grant, not for the individual grantees, having procedural tasks "in place" once the selection is made.
- Include cross-cutting dimensions (e.g. GAD) from the outset of problem/goal identification and consistently through design and resource decisions.
- Deal with logistical and financial elements of the grants up-front during the review workshops and as part of selection and training processes as a way to bring to the surface potential hurdles and gaps in grantee management capacity.
- Include specific references to the importance of looking for "unexpected" findings or challenges in the monitoring plans in order to catch shifts in direction early enough, both to make use of their potential to strengthen the programme and to correct for their dysfunctional impacts."

## 3H. MONITORING AND SUPPORTING GRANTEES

As many of the administrative procedures for competitive grants processes are set up in advance in CGPs, some program officers have found that they enjoy extra time to devote to monitoring and supporting awardees' research processes and capacity building.

The flexibility of competitive grants processes means that staff can design many activities and resources into their monitoring and support. Some of these have included:

- Proposal review workshops where short-listed candidates can meet each other, review each other's proposals and learn from each other, interact with staff from IDRC and the EGM, and interact with external advisors;
- Methodology workshops;
- Mid-term project review meetings;
- Findings workshops and dissemination events;
- On-going mentoring from external advisors and/or members;
- Networking and peer-mentoring among awardees;
- Connecting awardees to other IDRC PIs, networks and resources; and
- Maintaining contact with applicants and runners up to share findings and look for opportunities to further policy influence and knowledge utilization.



### 3I. WORKING WITH RUNNERS UP

The Ford Foundation's GrantCraft points out that working with the runners up in a competitive process can have several benefits:

- It can avoid burning bridges with old friends or potential future collaborating organizations;
- Maintain the grant maker's positive reputation;
- Encourage runners up to continue to work on promising research ideas;
- Helping them to connect with other funding opportunities either within the grant making organization or with other organizations; and
- Unsuccessful applicants might participate in network meetings, and be included in the dissemination of research results.

Several of IDRC's competitive grants have worked with runners up. Some provided seed money to further develop proposals to submit in future rounds of the competition, or to other funders. While often positive, Bernard (2007) also notes some risks with this approach:

- IDRC can rarely assure runners up that the Centre will hold future competitions and that they will win. For organizations which struggle with financial sustainability, spending more time on applications for potential future rounds may be unwise.
- IDRC's experience shows that few applicants were able to find other donors for their proposals.
- IDRC's other funding windows might be the best to fund further proposal development, instead of tying that function to a CG. However, the Centre has also seen complications with this strategy. As Bernard explains, "In one case, a post-selection decision to fund one of the losing proposals of an African CG, while positive for that team and done with the best intentions, created tension in the research community: it was given a larger budget than the selected group; it was in the same country as one of these others and competed with it for profile in the same donor and policy user community; and it drew off key researchers of one winner's core team."

## 4. COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES AS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

Running a good competition within IDRC means more than just ensuring the right elements are in place to identify and support excellent research. IDRC's mandate and approach requires that competitions also work as development initiatives.

In addition to producing quality research, expanding contacts, and the other benefits of competitive grants processes, IDRC has learned about using CGPs for:

- a. Capacity building;
- b. Policy influence and utilization;
- c. Facilitating networks and networking through competitive grants;
- d. Sustainability; and
- e. Supporting participatory research in competitive processes.

## 4A. WHAT HAS IDRC LEARNED ABOUT STRENGTHENING CAPACITY THROUGH COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

Competitive grants are allocated to the highest quality proposals chosen with a fair and transparent assessment against all others in the applicant pool. The highest quality proposals will often come from the researchers and institutions with the highest level of research and organizational capacity. So where does capacity building fit in?

- Competitive grants as learning processes
- Capacity building arrangements that appear to work
- Capacity building arrangements that are problematic
- Good practices that contribute to capacity development

### COMPETITIVE GRANTS AS LEARNING PROCESSES

Bernard writes: “If capacity development in the context of competitive grants is to be taken seriously, it will be necessary to undertake two inter-related tasks:

- (i) To consider all design and methods decisions in terms of their implications for facilitating or impeding learning; and
- (ii) To seek a reasonable balance between capacity and knowledge generation priorities at each point in the processes of project design, implementation and monitoring. In broad terms, these imply treating the CG as a whole as a learning opportunity.” (Bernard 2007)

#### A TENSION TO BALANCE...

IDRC CGPs must balance the Centre’s mandate to build research capacity in developing country contexts,

and

selecting the highest quality proposals – which often come from researchers with the highest levels of research, management, and institutional capacity.

According to evaluation reports, competitive grant processes were to help awardees develop their capacities in some way. Project descriptions implied that even senior researchers will increase their capacity for networking or policy influence. Moreover, most IDRC competitions explored new themes or methodologies, so learning will be an underlying rationale. So, while calls for proposals identified the kinds of capacity that must be in place to win a competition, IDRC’s CGPs have also built in two capacity building measures:

Assessing the varying degrees of capacity readiness of the applicants and Tailoring the grant arrangements to strengthening capacity gaps (Bernard 2007, p.41).

Capacity development priorities have led IDRC toward a more hands-on management style. IDRC good practices on capacity building, including intensive peer support and sustained mentoring, which are summarized below. Capacity building priorities have also led staff to build plans, resources, and time into competitive grants designs to ensure that capacity development goals are met.

## CAPACITY BUILDING ARRANGEMENTS THAT APPEAR TO WORK

Conceiving the overall design of the competitive grants project and all of the elements within it in terms of their implications for facilitating or impeding learning. Learning events within the stages of the CGP can include:

- *Introductory orientation* or project development seminars to enable applicants/grantees to understand, exchange and confirm expectations, new concepts and research methodologies;
- *Stock-taking workshops* among grantees, together with advisors and/or the referent community (e.g. the policy-makers expected to use the results), to assess progress and revisit initial assumptions;
- *Issue-specific* exchanges among subsets of the grantees to share new learning, related results;
- *Post-project opportunities* that link grantees and their products back into IDRC, its other Program activities and its networks;
- Focusing on people/awardees already in a learning mode e.g., young researchers associated with a new IDRC project, senior researchers struggling to shift their analyses;
- Recognizing that people do not learn what they do not have the opportunity to engage with. For example, "individual grants, implemented in isolation, are not likely to develop inter-disciplinary thinking or produce a network. If these are the goals, there needs to be sufficient and relevant means for getting there. Steps could include:
  - Planning and conducting on-site fieldwork with peers of other disciplines;
  - Asking researchers to use alternative paradigms to sort and interpret data;

### FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...

Capacity building in the RoKS CG was found to be limited for at least two reasons. First, the duration of the grants was short - only 12 to 18 months. Second, most awards went to experienced researchers. RoKS tried to increase its capacity building impact by targeting certain funds toward junior researchers.

### FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...

IDRC's Gender Unit proposed a two-tier process to both support capacity development and fund high quality research.

Tier 1 provided a small grant as seed funding to a number of organizations in order to: help establish the research field and support organizations to improve their proposals.

Tier 2 targeted large grant(s) to the best proposal(s) to generate new knowledge.

During the seed phase, IDRC traveled to project sites to:

- Assess partner institutions and research team dynamics.
- Build capacity, and help clarify expectations for the CG and dealing with IDRC.
- Deal with country clearance and institutional approval processes before the second tier funding.
- Encourage partners to improve the quality of their proposals within the spirit of competition laid out within the small grants.
- Cited in Bernard 2007, p.45

- Working through methodological problems with other grantee teams;
- Having ready access to diverse research materials and information data bases, for example through the IDRC research information services.

... from Evaluation Highlight #8: Competitive Grant Projects at IDRC

#### **CAPACITY BUILDING ARRANGEMENTS THAT ARE PROBLEMATIC**

- Providing insufficient resources of money, time and compensatory professional benefit.
- Not linking the competitive grants conceptually or practically into IDRC's wider agenda.
- Over-estimating the speed, linearity and uni-dimensionality of organizational learning, institution building or policy systems change and the extent to which these complex goals can be realized through the typically light-handed mechanism of a competitive grants project.

... from Evaluation Highlight #8: Competitive Grant Projects at IDRC

#### **GOOD PRACTICES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

In 2007, IDRC's Evaluation Unit summarized key findings of their strategic evaluation on capacity building. The following table outlines good practices that contribute to building sustainable research organizations and systems, and how these are manifested in IDRC.

<b>Good Practices That Contribute to Capacity Development</b>	<b>Manifested in IDRC through:</b>
<b>IDRC characteristics</b>	
Persistence	Sustained mentoring Continuity, prolonged engagement Iterative learning process Aim to build legitimacy, credibility and trust
Flexibility	Funding arrangements Location within Canadian government system Agility to respond to developing country needs
Resilience	Stay engaged under difficult circumstances Provide legitimacy, credibility and trust
<b>Building Partnerships</b>	
Relationships	Networks of individuals and organizations/institutions Inter-organizational linkages Face-to-face interactions between/among IDRC staff and researchers Providing legitimacy and credibility to partners and beneficiaries

<b>Good Practices That Contribute to Capacity Development</b>	<b>Manifested in IDRC through:</b>
<b>Harnessing Existing Capacities</b>	
Strategic Intelligence	Scan locally and globally, reinvent locally – regional presence to determine existing capacities Staff knowledge of regions
Build on existing capacities	Sustained mentoring – provide long-term support beyond “one-off training” sessions Regional presence – to determine existing capacities Use local, existing capacities rather than creating parallel systems
<b>Relevance of the Problem</b>	
Locally-driven agenda	Local ownership Local and global participation in determining the agenda Programs continually evolving to meet developing country demands Bring southern perspectives and voices to the analysis of development challenges Support development of major research initiatives when appropriate

Neilson and Lusthaus 2007 – elements adapted from the OCED’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) 2003 study on Capacity Development.

## 4B. POLICY INFLUENCE AND UTILIZATION

Competitive grants processes can attract senior researchers and produce high quality results. These people and products can be expected to be able to influence policy and ensure the utilization of research results. However, IDRC evaluations have found that three elements of competitive grants processes can render policy influence and utilization issues problematic. First, CGPs have planned for or claimed to do more than is reasonable. Second, their outcomes were rarely defined in outcomes terms at the level of the project. Third, CGP designs did not match proposed utilization ends with the means of achieving them.

### **POLICY AND UTILIZATION ARRANGEMENTS THAT APPEAR TO WORK**

Bernard’s review of five Centre evaluations<sup>3</sup> suggests that these elements improved policy influence and research utilization:

3 The five evaluations reviewed (available from the Evaluation Unit):

- Advanced Education and Training Options Available to IDRC, George Tillman, April 2005.
- Evaluation of Central America in the World Economy of the 21st Century, Fernando Loayza Careaga & Romulo Caballeros Otero, August 2005.
- Ecohealth Research Awards Program Tracer Study, Jessica White, January 2006.
- RoKS Competitive Grants Program: Review and Recommendations, Michael Graham, January 2006.
- Review of the Role of IDRC in the Scholarship Fund for Palestinian Refugee Women in Lebanon, Gail Larose, February 2006.

- Targeting themes to match changing regional policy priorities appears to have a better chance of leading to some policy influence;
- Commissioning targeted studies that build on CGP research appears to have more chance of policy influence than do the individual projects funded through the CGP; and
- Linking into on-going IDRC projects and networks facilitates the application of new skills and knowledge.

#### **POLICY AND UTILIZATION ARRANGEMENTS THAT ARE PROBLEMATIC**

IDRC evaluations showed that these elements diminished policy and utilization outcomes:

- devising competition themes without sufficient reference to the wider program or development context, and without sufficient reference to plans for next steps;
- providing insufficient time or resources for post-project dissemination of results;
- not including development of skills and knowledge expressly geared to implementation or application of results;
- failing to provide support for laboratories, databases, libraries and other support services to encourage dissemination and utilization; and
- funding in CGPs is generally short-term, while policy influence generally requires a long time horizon.

... from Evaluation Highlight #8: Competitive Grant Projects at IDRC

### **4C. FACILITATING NETWORKS AND NETWORKING THROUGH COMPETITIVE GRANTS**

IDRC's Evaluation Unit undertook a strategic study of networks and networking in 2004-2006. The study brought together findings on IDRC's approach and corporate learning related to:

- Capacity Building in Networks
- Coordination of Networks
- North-South Research Collaboration
- Planning and Evaluation of Networks
- Policy Influence of Networks
- Sustainability of Networks
- Using ICTs to Foster Collaboration in Networks

Many of IDRC's competitive grants processes also aim to build networks, or offer networking opportunities, for those involved. This section covers what IDRC evaluations have found about strategies that promoted networking among CGP awardees, and network arrangements that have been problematic.

- Strategies to promote networking among grantees
- Networking arrangements that are problematic

#### **STRATEGIES THAT HAVE PROMOTED NETWORKING AMONG GRANTEES**

Within competitive grant processes, grantees take up opportunities for networking when they had reasons, opportunities and resources for doing so. Bernard's papers provide some suggestions of strategies that facilitate networking among grantees.

- Proactively bring awardees together in a facilitated, purposive activity that will establish linkages on the basis of professional exchange to provide the space (but not assurance) for that potential.
  - Design and manage collaborative multi-donor competitive grants that promote, enable and build networking as the modus operandi of the project.
  - Provide regular opportunities for dialogue.
  - Set up an interactive website where IDRC, the EGM, and grantees can access and post materials.
  - Set up joint activities for grantees to work together.
  - Connect grantees with research centres, training institutions, donor networks.
  - Help other parts of IDRC connect with grantees and others newly associated with the Centre through the CGP.
  - Provide appropriate budgets and resources to support networking strategies.
  - Pursue networking within regional competitions, since connections among grantees will be more likely than in global competitions.
  - Link grantees to existing networks rather than trying to create new ones. It might be easier for people to link into existing networks rather than linking with competitors.
- ... from Bernard 2007, p.47-49, and Evaluation Highlight #8: Competitive Grant Projects at IDRC

### **QUESTIONING AN ASSUMPTION ... NETWORKS IN CGPs**

“The idea of creating, or working via, research networks seems to float in the background of the Gender Unit/WRC competitions without being explicitly identified as an objective. There is an implicit assumption, or at least hope, that some kind of network will emerge from the competition process, and by initiating a number of projects on a related topic simultaneously, the competition modality does provide some conditions for network formation. However, as WRC team members are aware, creating and sustaining networks is difficult and labour-intensive and unlikely to occur automatically. I think the question of networking is important and this evaluation should be helpful in assessing the different network-type experiences that emerge in the various competitions, and considering whether and how networking goals should be incorporated into the competition modality. Awardees seem enthusiastic about the potential for networking, but they need concrete opportunities and guidance.”  
Interim Report on Women and Decentralization 2007.

### **NETWORKING ARRANGEMENTS THAT ARE PROBLEMATIC**

In her review of five IDRC evaluations of CGPs, Bernard found that the projects did not fully achieve their networking goals. She found that the networking objectives were vague, as were plans for how the networks would be structured and operate. The evaluations showed the following problems with facilitating networks and networking within CGPs:

- Not being clear about the “why and how” of the networking idea;
  - failing to ensure that it is more than simply a rhetorical substitute;
  - selecting designs likely to impede networking, e.g., competitive selection scattered over a wide range, geographically, topically or in terms of researcher capacity;
  - under-resourcing the minimal conditions of a network; and
  - failing to plan follow-up activities of the competitive grants in ways that promote informal sharing and collaboration as the seeds of future networks.
- ... from Evaluation Highlight #8: Competitive Grant Projects at IDRC

#### 4D. WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

IDRC has used competitive grants processes to fund exploratory, fairly short-term research projects. From these one-off awards, some PIs have commissioned studies that built on awardee research, developed further in-depth research initiatives with some of the most promising projects, and incorporated the new line of inquiry into the wider PI agenda. Thus, while the PI's prospectus may be geared toward sustainable knowledge generation and results, the competitive grant process itself is more catalytic than durable (Bernard 2007, p.58).

Some elements of CGPs have enhanced the sustainability of knowledge outcomes:

- External advisors and EGMs can be asked to help ensure that outcomes were available to users, including policy-makers, practitioners and other researchers.
- The Centre can systematically connect applicants and grantees to other funding opportunities, other IDRC programs, networks, and each other in order to incorporate new actors and emergent findings into IDRC's development research circles.
- In terms of the competitions themselves, some PIs have devolved competitions to another institution that can maintain the grants on an independent and semi-permanent basis.

However, on their own, competitive grants processes have other characteristics that have worked against the sustainability individual research projects:

- They tended to be of short duration.
- They tended to be exploratory in nature, either of a new research area or a new methodology.
- Participatory approaches, which can have more sustainable research outcomes, have faced particular challenges in winning and proceeding under competitive arrangements. This is because it is more difficult to pre-determine the process and outcomes of participatory research, and CGPs have tended to select proposals that promise specific plans and results.
- In one instance, running a competition for a second round failed to provide opportunities to support the implementation of first round research results. Knowledge generation remained the priority for this competition, so first round winners who wished to move forward in their research implementation process found they were ineligible for further funding. (Bernard 2007, p.61)



## 4E. SUPPORTING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN COMPETITIVE PROCESSES

Where appropriate for the research subject matter, participatory research can lead to better and more sustainable research processes and outcomes than non-participatory approaches. However, IDRC has found that supporting participatory research through competitions has posed challenges to researchers, their individual projects and to the CGP as a whole.

Researchers undertaking participatory research are less able to predict the focus, trajectory and timing of their research as compared with those using other methodologies. Participatory research is more iterative than pre-determined. Competitions, however, assess proposals on pre-determined criteria. They tend to favour predictable processes and results over those that unfold progressively. Researchers and communities wishing to pursue participatory research can therefore be at a disadvantage in winning competitions.

During project implementation, a competition's requirements can require grantees to stick to their proposals as closely as possible. This ensures that all grantees stay on track and produce comparable findings. However, participatory projects can push researchers to respond to emergent findings, or to change their schedule. Siding with either the grant conditions or community priorities will leave researchers in a bind and can undermine either the research project, the grants program, or both.

For the Centre, if participatory processes require delays or changes in research focus, this can delay or jeopardize the plans of the competitive grant program as a whole. If one team's research is delayed, joint workshops on research findings, joint dissemination efforts, publications or other program events can be delayed. If individual projects change focus, the anticipated outcomes of the CGP might not be met.

### MITIGATING THE RISKS

Bernard makes some suggestions on how to allow for the strengths of participatory processes and mitigate against their potential risks in competitive processes.

It is important, then, to build expressly into the mechanism ways to ensure that adjustments can be made to grantee research projects in ways that protect both the individual case as well as the benefits of a multi-site programme. For example,

- "Work through potential grantee "drop-out" scenarios with respect to timing and direction; realistically assess the pliability of goals; and design for manoeuvrability through planned adaptation strategies and tools e.g. extra-budgetary allocations, advisory roles, inter-grantee exchange...
- "Include specific references to the importance of looking for "unexpected" findings or challenges in the monitoring plans in order to catch shifts in direction early enough, both to make use of their potential to strengthen the programme and to correct for their dysfunctional impacts." (Bernard 2007, p.17)

## 5. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The following is an initial list of frequently asked questions regarding competitive grants processes at IDRC. This list, and the beginnings of answers contained in this section, will doubtlessly evolve as the Centre develops its corporate learning on this program modality.

- a. What are the key differences between competitive grants processes and traditional IDRC projects?
- b. What is so time-consuming and labour-intensive about competitive grants processes?
- c. What are the issues of ownership in competitive grants processes?
- d. What are the sustainability issues in competitive grants processes?
- e. What are the dynamics of funding participatory research through competitive grants processes?
- f. What extra documentation is necessary within a CG process?
- g. Are competitive grants processes more open and transparent than other IDRC programs?

### 5A. WHAT ARE THE KEY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COMPETITIVE GRANTS AND TRADITIONAL GRANTS AT IDRC?

The following table summarizes some of the main differences in how IDRC sees and uses competitive grants, as compared to traditional grant mechanisms. Bernard admits this is a “somewhat overly simplistic dichotomy”. However, she offers it in order to make explicit assumptions about the underlying logic and values of the different modalities. She wishes to question to what extent the logic and values bear out in practice. Moreover, if the logic and values are desirable, the dichotomy might help IDRC staff to consider how to capitalize on the strengths of CGPs in project designs.

COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES	NON-COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES
<b>VALUES...</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Applying equitable criteria</li><li>• Transparent</li><li>• Objective</li><li>• Enabling change</li><li>• Producing cutting-edge knowledge</li><li>• Recognizing excellence</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tailored</li><li>• Negotiated</li><li>• Trust building</li><li>• Confidence creating</li><li>• Sharing risk and responsibility</li><li>• Strengthening capacity</li><li>• Facilitating learning</li><li>• Promoting partnership</li></ul>

COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES	NON-COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES
<b>MECHANICS...</b>	
IDRC develops the theme shorter duration – perhaps 1 or 2 years IDRC selects winners Several external actors involved (external grants managers, external advisors in design, selection and mentoring roles) More opportunities to devolve grant management to an intermediary organization	IDRC and recipient develop the theme together Longer duration – perhaps 3 or 4 years IDRC develops partnerships Fewer external actors involved IDRC typically manages grant arrangements
<b>IN SUMMARY...</b>	
Competitive grant-making puts the emphasis on assigning projects as fairly as possible, through well-framed articulation of research purpose and proposal guidelines, and objectively applied selection criteria and contractual arrangements; accurately assessing the researchers is key to this.	Traditional Centre grant-making puts the emphasis on developing projects as organically as possible, through interaction, negotiation and tailoring; accurately knowing the researchers and their context key to this.

## 5B. WHAT IS SO TIME-CONSUMING AND LABOUR-INTENSIVE ABOUT COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

It might seem that competitive grants processes should take less time and effort than traditional projects. POs just set up the competitive framework, receive proposals, decide on the winner(s), and let the winning teams implement their proposals. However, IDRC staff have found that CGPs take at least as much work as traditional grants, if not more. It may be that CGPs merely require different kinds of work, and at different stages in the grant-making process, as compared to traditional grants. So what takes all the time, and what requires so much work?

### QUESTIONING AN ASSUMPTION ...

Why do competitions seem to take as much or more work than traditional projects?

All of the following steps require time and attention by IDRC, even if they are going to be managed by third parties:

- determining the research scope: this can entail doing an initial scoping study on a topic area, interviewing known experts in the field to determine gaps in research, perhaps commissioning a concept paper to use in the call for proposals (determining its theme, contracting someone to write it, administering that contract, editing the paper);

- formulating the call for proposals;
- determining who should be able to apply;
- contracting with an external grants manager: this can include a call for proposals to select an EGM; reviewing the proposals, defining roles, responsibilities, communication, decision-making authority; managing the manager;
- publicizing the competition;
- gathering external advisors and defining their roles, authority and responsibilities. Building consensus with them about their participation in the program;
- receiving and reviewing proposals. (For example, the RoKS competition received 212 proposals for their first round of competition. RoKS eventually funded six of these);
- financial administration: country clearance procedures, preparing MGCs, correspondence, arranging payments, receiving and reviewing reports;
- monitoring research processes and results;
- determining capacity building needs and options for grantees; facilitating capacity building measures and events, monitoring mentoring;
- facilitating networking: between advisors and grantees, among grantees, connecting grantees with existing networks, helping grantees link with user communities; arranging peer review workshops, mid-term review of findings, final report workshops, joint publication of results; and
- supporting efforts for the utilization of research results and/or policy influence.

On the other hand, IDRC's CSPF notes that there are positive sides to all the work involved in setting up and running a competitive grants process. **A competition may be run a number of times, using largely the same framework and arrangements as the original competition.** Thus, it may be possible to scale out the competition to another theme, another geographic region, and another set of recipients. Subsequent rounds of competition would likely require less work than the first. Moreover, once staff have learned about setting up their first competition, they will probably find subsequent competitions easier to design and manage. Finally, **once the up-front work of setting up the competition is finished, IDRC staff have found that they have more time to monitor the research once it is underway.**

## 5C. WHAT ARE THE ISSUES OF OWNERSHIP IN COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

Ownership is a key principle in effective IDRC programs. IDRC has extensive experience in developing shared ownership of research initiatives between the Centre, recipient institutions, user communities, and other donors. However, competitive grants have more external actors and potentially more complicated ownership issues than those of traditional grants. Ambiguity and misunderstandings about the roles and ownership of different actors in IDRC CGPs have led to conflicts, delays and even a termination of CGP arrangements.

- Balancing ownership of the research agenda between IDRC and grants recipients
- Ownership by external grants managers

### **BALANCING OWNERSHIP OF THE RESEARCH AGENDA BETWEEN IDRC AND GRANTS RECIPIENTS**

IDRC has a high degree of ownership of CGPs because it has developed the theme of the competition more independently than it does in grants where projects are negotiated from the outset with partners. It has an especially high degree of ownership on competitions designed to increase the Centre's profile or brand in an area of research. In competitions funded by multiple donors, IDRC balances its ownership with that of the other funders.

On the other hand, once the winning applicants undertake their research, competitive arrangements call for a hands-off - or at least "light handed" - management style. Monitoring too closely, intervening on research management, introducing capacity-building arrangements, or trying to improve the quality of reports can all be seen as meddling. IDRC staff who are used to working in close partnerships might find that they are required to put aside some of their normal level of ownership and their normal ways of sharing responsibility for research and research products.

Bernard asks, "The lesson to be determined – and eventually applied – is to what extent it is feasible to design an IDRC-appropriate competitive grants arrangement: flexible enough to allow grantees the kind of ownership they need to take responsibility for their own actions, effectiveness and sustained change; and restricted or contained enough to allow IDRC to exercise its own right of ownership in intervening to make certain things happen." (2007, p.52)

## OWNERSHIP BY EXTERNAL GRANTS MANAGERS

External grants managers may feel ownership of a CG process on several levels:

On implementing processes and procedures as defined by IDRC on administrative matters related to publicizing the call for proposals, receiving applications, administering grant conditions, etc.;

On the quality of research and research management by grantees; and

On developing the capacity of grantees to work on the grant's theme.

Bernard suggests that the Centre be clear on whether the EGM is to be a contractor or a partner in the CGP. Either way, it is critical for each party to agree on roles, responsibilities, and authority so that each understands what levels of ownership to expect on each element of the competition.

### FROM IDRC EVALUATIONS...

**OWNERSHIP** of different aspects of the CGP need to be worked out between IDRC and an EGM, as discussed in this case:

"For the EGM, 'there were four reasons (why we applied for the administration of the grant). First, was scarcity of funds in (the region) with respect to (these) issues; it was important for us to facilitate access...Second, the importance of the theme itself... Third, we know and are linked through our networks to many organizations and so we could access them or get access to them for the competition. Fourth, our role as a capacity building organization and our expertise in this area, the tools we have; it made a natural fit. We are not just a funding organization, not interested in just administering funds. We are interested in the support (we can give) to the projects, to the contribution we can make to capacity building'.

"For the IDRC-based grants coordinator, responsibility to set the 'intellectual direction' rested within the Centre: '...(For example) the TORS state that the shortlist (of grantees) would be decided in collaboration with IDRC. This brings attention to the important issue of independence and autonomy. While it is clear that institutions can manage competitions on behalf of IDRC with independence, it is true that the more specific the TORS are, the less room for interpretation will exist. This does not imply that collaborating institutions should loose their creativity to improve the competition process, I think this is a desirable outcome, but in accordance to IDRC's mission and aims'"

(Bernard 2007, p.26)

## 5D. WHAT ARE THE SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

IDRC has used competitive grants processes to fund exploratory, fairly short-term research projects. From these one-off awards, some PIs have commissioned studies that built on awardee research, developed further in-depth research initiatives with some of the most promising projects, and incorporated the new line of inquiry into the wider PI agenda. Thus, while the PI's prospectus may be geared toward sustainable knowledge generation and results, the competitive grant process itself is more catalytic than durable (Bernard 2007, p.58).

Some elements of CGPs have enhanced the sustainability of knowledge outcomes:

- External advisors and EGMs can be asked to help ensure that outcomes were available to users, including policy-makers, practitioners and other researchers.
- The Centre can systematically connect applicants and grantees to other funding opportunities, other IDRC programs, networks, and each other in order to incorporate new actors and emergent findings into IDRC's development research circles.
- In terms of the competitions themselves, some PIs have devolved competitions to another institution that can maintain the grants on an independent and semi-permanent basis.

However, on their own, competitive grants processes have other characteristics that have worked against the sustainability of individual research projects:

- They tended to be of short duration.
- They tended to be exploratory in nature, either of a new research area or a new methodology.
- Participatory approaches, which can have more sustainable research outcomes, have faced particular challenges in winning and proceeding under competitive arrangements. This is because it is more difficult to pre-determine the process and outcomes of participatory research, and CGPs have tended to select proposals that promise specific plans and results.
- In one instance, running a competition for a second round failed to provide opportunities to support the implementation of first round research results. Knowledge generation remained the priority for this competition, so first round winners who wished to move forward in their research implementation process found they were ineligible for further funding (Bernard 2007, p.61).

## 5E. WHAT ARE THE DYNAMICS OF FUNDING PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH THROUGH COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES?

When appropriate for the research subject matter, participatory research can lead to better and more sustainable research processes and outcomes than non-participatory approaches. However, IDRC has found that supporting participatory research through competitions has posed challenges to researchers, their individual projects and to the CGP as a whole.

Researchers undertaking participatory research are less able to predict the focus, trajectory and timing of their research as compared with those using other methodologies. Participatory research is more iterative than pre-determined. Competitions, however, assess proposals on pre-determined criteria. They tend to favour predictable processes and results over those that unfold progressively. Researchers and communities wishing to pursue participatory research can therefore be at a disadvantage in winning competitions.

During project implementation, a competition's requirements can require grantees to stick to their proposals as closely as possible. This ensures that all grantees stay on track and produce comparable findings. However, participatory projects can push researchers to respond to emergent findings, or to change their schedule. Siding with either the grant conditions or community priorities will leave researchers in a bind and can undermine either the research project, the grants program, or both.

For the Centre, if participatory processes require delays or changes in research focus, this can delay or jeopardize the plans of the competitive grant program as a whole. If one team's research is delayed, joint workshops on research findings, joint dissemination efforts, publications or other program events can be delayed. If individual projects change focus, the anticipated outcomes of the CGP might not be met.

### MITIGATING THE RISKS

Bernard makes some suggestions on how to allow for the strengths of participatory processes and mitigate against their potential risks in competitive processes.

It is important, then, to build expressly into the mechanism ways to ensure that adjustments can be made to grantee research projects in ways that protect both the individual case as well as the benefits of a multi-site programme. For example,

- "Work through potential grantee "drop-out" scenarios with respect to timing and direction; realistically assess the pliability of goals; and design for manoeuvrability through planned adaptation strategies and tools e.g. extra-budgetary allocations, advisory roles, inter-grantee exchange...
- "Include specific references to the importance of looking for "unexpected" findings or challenges in the monitoring plans in order to catch shifts in direction early enough, both to make use of their potential to strengthen the programme and to correct for their dysfunctional impacts." (Bernard 2007, p.17)



# 5F. WHAT EXTRA DOCUMENTATION IS NECESSARY WITHIN A CG PROCESS?

IDRC could benefit from having extra documentation from projects using competitive grants processes. This could ensure more clarity among the additional external actors typically involved in competitions. Documenting the process is also crucial for Centre-wide learning about a modality that is increasing in scope and priority across IDRC programs.

In addition to regular program records, it can be helpful if competitive grants processes document:

- IDRC’s assumptions on how the elements of the competitive process will achieve specific program aims
- How EGMs are identified and contracted
- The roles, responsibilities, authorities, and communication expectations for external advisors
- How calls for proposals are handled
- Application processes and requirements
- How selection processes are designed and run
- Narrative explanations of proposal reviews and how reviewers apply selection criteria
- How the program decides to balance expectations of hands-off management of the competition versus a hands-on management to address capacity building, networking, sustainability, and the utilization of research results.

# 5G. ARE COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES MORE OPEN AND TRANSPARENT THAN OTHER IDRC PROGRAMS?

Competitions might seem to be a more transparent funding mechanism than traditional projects. Rather than developing a research program with a partner/recipient, in competitions, IDRC sets out a call for proposals and clearly states on what criteria applications will be assessed for funding. Competitions can be seen to be more open (because you don’t have to first get to know IDRC program staff) and equitable (because you will be assessed objectively against known criteria) as compared to traditional program modalities. However, the contexts, mandate and approach in and from which IDRC operates means that IDRC balances

## VALUES TO BALANCE: TRANSPARENCY VERSUS TAILORING TO DIFFERENT CONTEXTS AND PARTNERS

In designing competitive grants processes, IDRC balances the values and strengths of CGPs with those of traditional grant modalities:

<b>Assigning</b> projects as <b>fairly</b> as possible.	<b>and</b>	<b>Developing</b> projects as <b>organically</b> as possible.
Transparent and equitable assessment	<b>and</b>	Tailored and shared responsibility

these values of CGPs with those of traditional project mechanisms: tailoring ideas and approaches to different contexts, sharing risk and responsibility, and developing relationships with partners.

Regarding research contexts, IDRC works in research and development country contexts that vary significantly. While selection processes set out predetermined criteria, meeting those criteria from an uneven playing field can prejudice some applicants while favouring others. IDRC staff will probably try to account for these variations in how they apply selection criteria, but this can pose a dilemma in undermining the perceived impartiality and transparency of the competition.

Moreover, IDRC's mandate and approach includes capacity building and sharing responsibility with recipients for program and research results and utilization. In competitions, IDRC might work with short-listed applicants to improve their proposals before selecting winners. While being potentially helpful for those applicants and beneficial in improving the program's outcomes, it might be seen as unfair to those who were not shortlisted, but might be able to produce winning proposals if they had received that kind of input from the Centre. Moreover, intervening to improve capacity can undermine the sense that applicants were selected on the basis of the quality of their candidature.



## 6. CASE STUDIES OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES IN IDRC

### 6A. GENDER AND JUSTICE IN POST-CONFLICT SOCIETIES COMPETITIVE GRANTS CASE STUDY

The Gender and Justice grant competition was aimed at supporting research on the linkages between formal state mechanisms for justice and informal or traditional mechanisms and practices in post-conflict societies. Four sub-themes were to be examined: (1) Criminal (retributive) justice; (2) Reparative (or compensatory) justice; (3) Restorative (or community-based) justice and (4) Distributive (or economic) justice.

Specific objectives included:

1. To support research that will document and analyse specific models, mechanisms, public policies and practices for access to and delivery of gender justice;
2. To assist in strengthening the community of practice on gender justice in Latin America;
3. To contribute to the systematic gathering of knowledge that is emerging in this research area and make it more readily available;
4. To support research dissemination activities that will inform researchers, citizens, policymakers and judicial operators on the particular needs of women and men for the achievement of their civil, political, cultural, social and economic rights in societies in conflict or emerging from conflict;
5. To inform internal discussions in both the Gender Unit (now called the Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) Program Initiative) and the Peace Building and Reconstruction program (PBR)<sup>4</sup> on how they might articulate research programs that can help challenge the gendered nature of peacebuilding and social policy for non-discrimination, justice and equality.

The following is a brief case study on the design and implementation of the Gender and Justice competitive grants process.

#### ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

##### 1. Duration, Size and Number of Rounds of Competition

- Funding for two years or more.
- A maximum of CAD \$400,000 for each grant.
- One round of competition. The winning proposal was to be funded through resources from FY 2004-2005 and it was hoped that if a second proposal of equal quality was received that this proposal would be funded through resources from FY 2005-2006 (from both WRC and PBR budgets).

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4 PBR is now referred to as the Peace, Conflict and Development (PCD) program initiative.

- The competition was jointly funded by PBR and the Gender Unit, with PBR acting as the lead PI.

## 2. Geography

- Open to researchers based in either Guatemala or Colombia.<sup>5</sup>

## 3. Calls for Proposals (CFP) and Application Processes

### CFPs

- The research theme for the CFP was developed through a series of consultations/ meetings with researchers and other stakeholders in Guatemala and Colombia.
- Proposals were to focus on Guatemala or Colombia or a comparison between the two.
- A consultant helped to develop and launch the CFP and manage the overall application and peer review process.
- The CFP was posted on IDRC's website and on ECHO.net, distributed electronically to LACRO for publication in the "Compartimos" newsletter, appeared on major list serves dealing with gender and conflict in Latin America and was sent to organizations and networks with an interest in the topic.
- The competition aimed to fund researchers working in multi-disciplinary teams.

### Application Process

- Proposals were first organized by the consultant; 30 proposals were received and 25 were eligible.
- Proposals were then screened and reviewed by an Internal Selection Committee comprised of Gender Unit and PBR staff and in accordance with the criteria set out in the CFP. <sup>6</sup> Six proposals were short-listed.
- The short-list was then sent to an International Selection Committee<sup>7</sup> for peer review and the final selection of two semi-finalists that would receive up to a maximum of CAD \$15,000 "seed" funding for further proposal development activities.
- The proposal from the Guatemalan team ended up being strong enough that further proposal development was not deemed necessary. Therefore, the Guatemalan team was awarded the full grant for FY 2004-2005.
- Two Colombian teams were awarded the CAD \$15,000 "seed" grants to more fully develop their proposals. The two teams were asked to submit 2 pages outlining how they were going to use the "seed" funds, and after approximately six weeks of preparation, a final research proposal. In coordination with IDRC staff, each team held a project development workshop to help guide the proposal development process. The IDRC PO attended each of these workshops.
- One of the Colombian teams was then awarded a full grant for FY 2005-2006.<sup>8</sup>

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5. Researchers could collaborate with citizens from developed countries.

6. Proposals were evaluated by quality of proposal/methodology (40%), potential for impact (30%), suitability of candidate and research team (10%) and feasibility (10%).

7. The International Selection Committee was comprised of four independent reviewers (consultants) and remained anonymous for the duration of the selection process and was solely responsible for choosing the recipients of the grants.

8. The International Selection Committee did not participate in deciding who was awarded this grant.

- An advantage of using the “seed” funding for proposal development was that it allowed IDRC to have greater input into the direction of the research and greater opportunities for capacity building. The proposal development process allowed for more back-and-forth communication between the grantees and IDRC staff, whereas in the Guatemala case once the grant was awarded the research plan was essentially concrete.

#### 4. Number of Grantees

- Two grants were awarded – one to a team from Guatemala and one to a team from Colombia.

#### 5. Expanding IDRC’s contacts

- The objective of the Gender Justice competition was not necessarily to attract new researchers, but rather to demonstrate to the Gender Unit and PBR that there is interest in this theme in Latin America. Nonetheless, as a new theme for IDRC, the competition invariably attracted new researchers. Both awardees (and their related institutions) were new to IDRC.

#### 6. Using External Advisors

- External consultants were used for the International Selection Committee.

#### 7. Managing Competitive Grants Processes: in-house or by an external grants manager?

- The competition was managed in-house, although because of heavy front-end workload, a consultant was hired to help develop and launch the CFP and manage the overall application and peer review process.

#### 8. Monitoring and Supporting Grantees

- Monitoring and supporting grantees mostly occurred through emails, phone calls and site visits. As already mentioned, IDRC program staff also attended both of the Colombia teams’ project development workshops.

#### 9. Working with Runners Up

- IDRC program staff worked with the team from Colombia that was not awarded the grant in order to strengthen the quality of their proposal for possible funding with other donors. Program staff also initiated contact with the Ford Foundation’s Mexico and Santiago office’s to discuss the possibilities of funding the project.

### **COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES AS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES**

#### 1. Building research capacity

- There was considerable amount of peer-to-peer support during the proposal development process for the Colombian team including ongoing email and phone conversations and site visits. Grantees were provided with support on a variety of

substantive issues including bibliographic resources, methodology, etc.

- As mentioned earlier, using a “seed” funding approach to proposal development for the two Colombian teams provided greater opportunities for capacity building activities. IDRC staff participated in project development workshops, and in general were able to provide more input in and support to the project development process.

## 2. Policy influence and Utilization

- Policy influence and utilization was not an explicit objective of the Gender Justice competition. Nonetheless, there were specific policy outcomes, mostly related to the action research conducted by the Guatemalan team. For example, the Guatemalan team provided a gender workshop for the Guatemalan National Reparation Program and worked with a community to strengthen their ability to lobby the government on reparation and gender issues. This advocacy work contributed to the National Reparation Program integrating gender analysis into their work plan.

## 3. Networks and Networking

- Both the Colombian and Guatemalan research teams (through funding from IDRC) participated in the 2007 LASA conference on Gender and Reparation, allowing the teams to develop relationships with the larger gender justice research community in Latin America.
- It is recognized that not having a joint meeting between the research teams from Guatemala and Colombia was probably a missed opportunity for networking.

## 4. Sustainability

- As a result of decisions taken regarding the directions of WRC programming, the focus of the Gender Justice research competition was primarily on managing the two research competitions discussed above rather than future issues related to sustainability.

## 5. Supporting Participatory Research

- The CFP made it clear that the competition would support social science research based on feminist and participatory approaches and thus supporting participatory research was a primary focus of this research competition.
- For example, the Guatemalan project worked with a community to strengthen their ability to lobby the Guatemalan government on reparation and gender issues.
- The Colombian team interviewed (using video) community members on what for them would be reparation – essentially giving voice to those who have historically been marginalized.

## 6B. PAN-ASIA INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D) GRANTS PROGRAMME CASE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

The Pan-Asia ICT R&D Grants Programme has the objective of building institutional research capacity in the developing countries of the Asia-Pacific region, in the area of Internet networking. It is directed at encouraging original and innovative networking solutions to specific development problems. The funds for the Grants Programme are provided by the Pan Asia Networking Program of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (APDIP) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>9</sup>, the Asia Pacific Network Information Center (APNIC), and Microsoft.<sup>10</sup> The Programme had been administered by the Asian Media Information and Communication Centre (AMIC), but as a result of a new management approach is now being administered by APNIC<sup>11</sup>.

Well over 60 grants have been funded to date, which address research on diverse topics such as networking and information sharing, rural development, gender analysis, Internet access and performance, telemedicine, e-learning, e-government, agriculture and environment and culture preservation.

The following provides a brief description of the design and implementation of the Pan-Asia competitive grants process for the period from 2002-2005.

### ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

#### 1. Duration, Size and Number of Rounds of Competition

- Grants of up to a maximum budget of US\$9,000 over a term not exceeding 12 months. Grants up to a maximum budget of US\$30,000 over a term not exceeding 24 months.
- Two rounds of competitions held each year in March and October.<sup>12</sup>

#### 2. Geography

- Open to developing country organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. Applications from a consortium of developed and developing country organizations are also encouraged and project proposals that reflect co-funding by other agencies are

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9. UNDP is no longer providing funding for the Pan-Asia Programme.

10. Partner contributions are currently US \$100,000 per year and Corporate Supporter contributions are US \$250,000 per year.

11. The new partnership with APNIC, the Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF.asia), began in 2008 and the first grant was launched at the end of May, 2008. APNIC and ISOC are providing parallel funding, where their contributions go only to the grants themselves, whereas IDRC's supports the administrative costs.

12. Beginning with the grant that was awarded in May 2008, there is now only one grant competition each year with maximum grant value of \$30,000.



favourably considered.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. Calls for Proposals (CFPs) and Application Processes

#### Calls for Proposals

- The Board of Directors (BoD)<sup>14</sup> provides the strategic direction for the Programme, including developing the themes and criteria for the CFPs.
- AMIC is responsible for managing the CFPs. AMIC markets the CFPs through a variety of publications and initiatives, including the AMIC annual conference. AMIC published a special issue of its journal Media Asia on the Pan Asia ICT R&D Grants Programme and publishes articles in the Asian Media Communications Bulletin.
- IDRC and UNDP also advertise the CFP on their websites and send notices out by email to various contacts.

#### Application Process

- Proposals are submitted through an application form and generally over 100 applications are received for each competition.
- Pre-screening of the application is conducted by the program partners and a specialist from outside of the Programme. Approximately 30 applications are short-listed.
- The BoD meets to discuss and debate on the final selection of awardees. Following the selection of the grant recipients, the BoD conducts a broader meeting to discuss programmatic related issues.
- Approximately six or seven grants are awarded for each competition; approximately 14 grants are awarded each year.<sup>15</sup>
- The results of the awarded projects are transparent and made available publicly on the Programme and partner websites and by other means, as appropriate.

### 4. Expanding IDRC's contacts

- One of the main purposes of the Pan-Asia Grants Programme is to find new innovators (i.e. who's who and who's doing what).
- As a competitive grants programme, Pan-Asia is able to explore areas that are not included in IDRC's programme prospectus and regions where IDRC does not have a strong presence.

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13. Applicants must be a government body or a legally incorporated entity. Applicants from private organizations have to be in partnership with civil services/NGOs/Not-for-profit organizations. Applications from unaffiliated individuals, or from teams of such individuals, are not accepted.

14. The Board of Directors (BoD) is comprised of one member from each partner and is responsible for all programme direction and for formal approval of recommendations from the grants committee.

15. The main criteria used to assess the applications include: clear objectives, oriented towards specific issues or problems within the scope of the ICT R&D Grants Programme; demonstrated need for R&D results of the type proposed, and in the form proposed; relevance to regional development priorities, such as economic policy, gender equity, environment, education, social development and capacity building concerns will be considered; the targeted beneficiary groups should be clearly identified; demonstrated capacity by the applying organisation to conduct and document the project effectively within the specified budget and time limits; solid participation by organisations from the developing Asia-Pacific region.

## 5. Using External Advisors

- A specialist from outside the Programme works with the BoD to make a short-list for the final selection of awardees.

## 6. Managing Competitive Grants Processes: in-house or by an external grants manager?

- The Programme is administered by AMIC. AMIC is responsible for administering the grants, monitoring the progress of the projects, ensuring objectives and deadlines are met and maintaining and enhancing the public and internal Pan-Asia Programme web site.<sup>16</sup>

## 7. Number of Grantees

- From 2002-2005, the Programme received 642 project proposals from 34 countries and 64 projects were funded. Eight were subsequently either delayed or cancelled for a variety of reasons. Of the remaining 56 projects seven are specifically regional in nature while the others are located or managed in 14 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, namely, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Nauru, Solomon Islands, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam.<sup>17</sup>

## 8. Monitoring and Supporting Grantees

- When meeting to select new awardees, the BoD chooses a meeting location where they are also be able to monitor and support one of the current awardees. Otherwise, there are very few formal processes for monitoring and supporting grantees.
- IDRC and UNDP staff also support and monitor grantees, but do so on a case by case basis and thus not all projects benefit equally from the attention of the partners in this fashion.
- According a 2006 evaluation of the Pan-Asia Programme, a number of grantees mentioned the benefits of receiving direct contact with some of the professionals from the Pan partners. This type of intervention and follow up are considered to be the most useful to the awardees because they are substantive and because they deal with practical issues related to research management and research networking.<sup>18</sup>

## 9. Working with Runners Up

- IDRC funds runners-up on a case by case basis, particularly if a project's selection for an award did not gain consensus from all of the programme partners, but was deemed favourable by IDRC.

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16. As mentioned earlier, APNIC is now responsible for managing the Pan-Asia Grants Programme.

17. Project categories include: health and medicine (10); access to information (13); environment and agriculture (6); technical innovation (15); policy and social research (7); capacity building and education (5).

18. Labelle, Richard (2006), "Pan Asia ICT R&D Grants Programme: Final report incorporating all deliverables (1-9) and a final section entitled: observations, conclusions and recommendations."

## COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES AS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

### 1. Building research capacity

- The Pan-Asia Programme favours projects that include a strong capacity building component in the project's design.
- In addition to project level capacity initiatives, a Learning Forum<sup>19</sup> was held approximately five years into the Programme, which brought together all current and past grant recipients for networking opportunities and to participate in a number of workshops and seminars.

### 2. Policy influence and Utilization

- All of the project partners have policy influence and utilization mandated as a strategic priority and thus are more likely to fund projects that include a strong policy influence component.
- Action research is also favoured because of the benefits related to policy influence and utilization.

### 3. Networks and Networking

- There was hope for creating networking opportunities, but other than the Learning Forum little has been done as coordinated through the Pan-Asia Programme.
- IDRC invites awardees to a number of events, such as the GK3 conference, as this more or less occurs naturally and informally through IDRC Program Officers' regular work.

### 4. Sustainability

- All of the partner organizations are mandated to address sustainability, but in reality this is difficult in the ICT field where high risk is necessary. The Programme aims to fund sustainable business models, but is also aware that many projects will fail and that seeking innovation requires funding risky ventures.

### 5. Supporting Participatory Research

- The PAN Asia Programme rarely funds projects that do not include a participatory component. The Programme seeks to fund projects that include multiple stakeholders, from multiple sectors of society. Each project must have a local partner(s), preferably an organization that is willing to also provide additional funding. Multi country projects are also preferred.

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19. This conference was held successfully on Feb 21-23, 2007 in Singapore with the main objective being interactive knowledge exchange/networking event. The meeting had three key objectives: (1) enable R&D project leaders/researchers to connect and exchange ideas and findings; (2) generate ideas and recommendations on how to improve the grants programme; (3) advance the development of the research publication presently undertaken by AMIC on behalf of the programme partners.

## 6C. RESEARCH ON KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (ROKS) COMPETITIVE GRANTS CASE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

When proposed to the IDRC Board of Governors in 2001, the overall objective of RoKS was to explore, from a developing country standpoint, the ways in which knowledge is produced, communicated, and applied to development problems, and the policy and institutional frameworks which govern this process. During its initial phase, RoKS sought to:

- Promote analysis and debate at the local, national, and international level on key issues in the evolution and functioning of “knowledge systems” in developing countries;
- Establish IDRC’s reputation as an innovator in this area, and in particular as a channel for independent southern perspectives and voices; and
- Identify longer-term activities and partners with which to pursue these initiatives.

The annual competitive grants research competition represents the centre-piece of RoKS activities.<sup>20</sup> It is intended to serve both as a test-case for RoKS’ longer-term involvement in the field, and as a seed-bed for other ongoing activities. Focussing each year on a specific issue or theme, the competition was the first major activity to be launched under RoKS in the 2001-2002 fiscal year.

The following is a brief case study on the design and implementation of the RoKS competitive grants process.

### ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

#### 1. Duration, Size and Number of Rounds of Competition

- Funding for 18-24 months.
- Maximum grant of CAD 80K for each of the first two competitions and between CAD 70-190K for the third and fourth competitions.
- Two competitions have been concluded (one that began in FY 2001-2002, and one in 2002-2003) and two are currently in progress (the first began in FY 2003-2004 and the second in FY 2004-2005).

#### 2. Geography

- Open to researchers from the developing world.<sup>21</sup>
- In the first three competitions, all applicants applied for the same type of grant.

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20. It is important to differentiate between the “RoKS Exploration” and the “RoKS Competition”. RoKS was an exploration of the Centre, and the RoKS Call for Proposals was an Awards Project within the exploration and not a programme in and of itself. The RoKS competition was a funding modality for the RoKS Exploration with an allocation of 75% of the program budget.

21. Researchers must be affiliated with a legally constituted developing country institution. Researchers can collaborate with citizens of developed countries. An evaluation of RoKS in 2006 recommended that regional competitions be considered in order to allow for more commonalities among researchers, and thus greater networking opportunities (Graham, 2006).

For the fourth competition, awards were broken down by regional awards, national awards and graduate research awards specifically targeting West Francophone Africa.

### 3. Calls for Proposals (CFPs) and Application Processes

#### Calls for Proposals

- An International Advisory Committee and an Internal Advisory Committee of IDRC staff were formed to provide guidance and feedback on the direction of the RoKS exploratory program, including the CFPs and application processes. The majority of the members of the International Advisory Committee reside in developing countries.
- Research themes were developed by IDRC staff in consultation with the two advisory committees.
- The CFPs were disseminated through CIDA's website, other major donors, IDRC regional offices, ECHOnet, senior managers at IDRC, IDRC networks, members of the International Advisory Committee and the IDRC website.

#### Application Process

- First competition (one-stage application process):
  - Proposals were submitted via an application form (22-page document) developed by RoKS for the competition and formal proposal (20-35 pages). A total of 127 applications were received.
  - A pre-screening checklist was created to determine if a proposal met the application criteria.<sup>22</sup> The applications were then judged, screening out incomplete and ineligible applications. Of the 127 applications, 84 were eligible and complete.
  - The RoKS team then short-listed the applications using a set of pre-determined evaluation criteria. The short-list included 35 applications.
  - The International Advisory Committee then conducted a final review (peer review process). The advisory committee was anonymous for the duration of the selection process. After the results were announced the names of the members of the advisory committee were made public. Final selection of applicants was made "on the basis of excellence".<sup>23</sup>
- Subsequent Competitions (two-stage application process):
  - As a result of receiving complaints that the application form was too long and time consuming, applicants are now asked to first submit an 8-page concept-note

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22. The two most common reasons for a proposal not passing the pre-screening criteria were: the section of the application form called institutional consent was not signed; and the topic did not fit within the CFP (Graham, 2006)

23. All eligible applications are reviewed based on the following criteria: quality and feasibility of research proposal (weighting 40%); potential for impact (weighting 30%); and suitability of candidate and research team (weighting 30%).

rather than a full application. Following a review of the submissions, qualified applicants are then asked to submit full proposals.

- Same application procedures as described above.

#### 4. Number of Grantees

- There were six grants awarded in the first competition, six in the second competition, and as a result of additional funding provided by the Rockefeller Foundation, nine grants were awarded in the third competition<sup>24</sup>. A total of seven grants were awarded in the fourth competition – three regional, three national and one graduate student award<sup>25</sup>.

#### 5. Expanding IDRC's contacts

- RoKS is seen as a test-case for longer-term involvement in the field, and as a seedbed for other ongoing activities, and thus a primary aim of RoKS is to identify promising new researchers.
- Approximately half of the institutions that have participated in RoKS have not previously received Centre funding.
- According to the 2006 RoKS evaluation, the desire of the RoKS awards program to find "new" institutions has had a direct bearing on the administrative requirements for the project approval process (Graham, 2006).

#### 6. Using External Advisors

- The International Advisory Committee were all external advisors who were responsible for providing advice on research themes, reviewing proposals and applications, attending workshops, etc.

#### 7. Managing Competitive Grants Processes: in-house or by an external grants manager?

- RoKS is managed in-house.

#### 8. Monitoring and Supporting Grantees

- Workshops were conducted at the initial stage of the research process, bringing together RoKS awardees with available Advisory Committee members, Centre staff and prior RoKS awardees. The workshop for the fourth competition was much more rigorous and in-depth, specifically focussing on research methodologies.
- Regional mid-term research workshops were organized for the third competition: Brazil for Latin America, Singapore for Asia, and Uganda for Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Final workshops are planned for the third and fourth competitions.
- A D-Group was created to help develop an ongoing exchange of information and to provide a space for posting relevant research issues and articles.
- For the first two competitions monitoring and support was mostly provided through emails.

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<sup>24</sup> One did not receive Government of India approval; hence of the nine selected, only eight received funding.

<sup>25</sup> Ten graduate student awards were available, but only two applications were received.

## 9. Working with Runners Up

- All applicants who were not recommended for funding were notified via e-mail by the RoKS team.
- In the fourth competition, the RoKS team let all applicants know which research teams had been awarded the grants, helped to develop connections between awardees and the runners up and provided runners up with information on RFPs of other donor organizations.

## COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES AS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

### 1. Building research capacity

- Capacity building for the first two competitions was carried out through informal email discussions with IDRC staff, mostly involving research methodology, and also through the workshops as noted above.<sup>26</sup>
- Efforts for the third and fourth competitions took a much more hands-on approach and focused on strengthening the skills of the grantees that were perceived to be most weak: for example, evaluation skills, disseminating research results, methodology, etc. This approach involved more consistent and ongoing email correspondence, initial and mid-term workshops and on-site visits.

### 2. Policy influence and Utilization

- Policy influence and utilization was not a focus in the first two competitions.
- For the third and fourth competitions the RoKS team encouraged awardees to involve local policy-relevant institutions in team meetings. The goal has been to create ownership of the awardees' research among these institutions and thus increase the likelihood that the research results will influence policy decisions.

### 3. Networks and Networking

- Networking activities were limited during the first two competitions as a result of a lack of IDRC human resources dedicated to networking/capacity building activities.
- The much more hands-on approach used throughout the third and fourth competitions led to much greater networking among the grantees and other partners. For example, the degree of rigour involved in the workshop for the fourth competition allowed grantees to become much more involved in each others' work, thus allowing for stronger linkages that would later help to maintain ongoing communications. Further, IDRC staff and advisory committee members simply had more time to link awardees with other partners, such as donors or researchers.

### 4. Sustainability

- For the first and second competitions the RoKS program was very new and still didn't have a firm place at IDRC (i.e. RoKS was an exploration of the Centre, not a program initiative). Due to the "uncertainty" of resources (both financial and human),

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<sup>26</sup> RoKS was originally an exploration of the Centre and thus did not have FTEs for the first 2 competitions; therefore rigour was a problem for the first two competitions.

RoKS' focus was on the tasks at hand, rather than sustainability.

- The RoKS awards competition is now grounded in the Innovation, Technology and Society Program (ITS) Initiative and has developed into a much more coherent awards program (including having a five year plan) in which the awardees are part of a larger network that extends beyond the competitive grants process. The RoKS competitive grants are now essentially viewed as first phase pilot projects for further project development after the initial 2-3 years. The RoKS competition serves as a transparent method of identifying new proponents for the ITS PI.

## 5. Supporting Participatory Research

- Not applicable

# 6D. DECENTRALIZATION AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS COMPETITIVE GRANTS CASE STUDY

## INTRODUCTION

Women's Rights and Citizenship (WRC) is motivated by a vision "of a just world where women in the South have a sense of self that includes citizenship and the right to have rights; where all individuals have equitable access to justice and the opportunity to participate meaningfully in democratic decision-making; and where there is no discrimination based on gender in realizing the full range of one's rights and freedoms, including economic rights and sexual and reproductive rights." The Gender Unit, WRC's predecessor, chose annual research competitions as a key modality for achieving its objectives.

The competition series on decentralization recognizes that decentralization is widespread throughout developing countries and has become a standard part of the policy package recommended by major donor organizations. The competition aims to support evidence-based research on whether and how contemporary decentralization reforms in practice contribute to—or hinder—the realization and protection of women's and girls' civil, political, social, economic and/or cultural rights. In addition to generating knowledge, these competitions have aimed at developing research capacities and creating strategic links between researchers and women's organizations.

The following provides a brief description of the design and implementation of the Decentralization and Women's Rights competitive grants process.

## ELEMENTS OF COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES

### 1. Duration, Size and Number of Rounds of Competition

- There have been three rounds of competitions based on region: Sub-Saharan



Africa launched in 2004; South East Asia in 2005; and Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2006.<sup>27</sup>

- Funding for 18-24 months.
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Maximum grant value of CAD \$100,000; South Asia: CAD \$100,000; LAC: CAD \$120,000.

## 2. Geography

- Applications were only accepted from developing country institutions from the respective regions.<sup>28</sup>

## 3. Calls for Proposals (CFPs) and Application Processes

### Calls for Proposals

#### **Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asian Competitions**

- The research competition themes were developed from informal discussions with the Gender Unit and IDRC at large, followed by the preparation of background papers by a consultant. The background papers included an external and internal scoping exercise and literature review aimed at assessing the relevance and general level of interest in gender and decentralization as a research theme and suggested an overall research agenda. The background papers were included with both of the CFPs.
- The CFPs were distributed widely, though only electronically, through electronic lists, emails and the IDRC website.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Competition**

- The LAC competition was co-coordinated and administered by IDRC and its local partner, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), Argentina. FLACSO-Argentina managed the CFP and application process, organized an international workshop and provided follow-up for winning researchers through communication activities and an exchange of information and documentation.
- The competition theme was developed from informal discussion with the Gender Unit and IDRC at large, followed by the preparation of a background paper by the Gender Unit Professional Development Awardee. The background paper was included with the CFP.
- A dissemination and communication strategy for the CFP was designed by FLACSO-Argentina to reach a large number of organizations, academic institutions and representatives from civil and political society. Approximately 1,800 emails and 2,000 posters were sent to universities and research departments, women and development NGOs, environmental organizations, research institutes, academic

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27 The Sub-Saharan Africa competition funded five projects in Sudan, Ghana, South Africa, Nigeria and Benin; the South Asia competition funded five projects to researchers in India, Nepal, and Pakistan; the LAC competition awarded funds to four research projects in Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador/Honduras, and Paraguay. The African research projects are complete, but the South Asian and LAC projects are ongoing.

28 All principal researchers and co-researchers had to be citizens of developing countries and not permanent residents of a developed country. Scholars temporarily visiting a developed country were eligible.

journals and magazines, local, regional and thematic networks, as well as the local offices of UN agencies.<sup>29</sup>

- FLACSO-Argentina set up an interactive web space for those institutions interested in submitting proposals to ask questions regarding the competition.

### Application Process

#### **Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asian Competitions**

- Ninety proposals were received from 23 Sub-Saharan African countries; and 45 proposals were received from South Asian countries.
- A shortlist was developed by Gender Unit Staff.<sup>30</sup>
- The shortlist was then reviewed by an anonymous International Selection Committee, which included a mix of academics, consultants, and others, selected either for their academic credentials and familiarity with the decentralization literature, or for their connection to work in the field. Each proposal was reviewed by two external jury members and one IDRC staff member.

#### **Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Competition**

- FLACSO-Argentina managed the application process.
- 81 proposals were received from institutions in 18 countries.<sup>31</sup>
- A technical team of FLACSO-Argentina and Gender Unit staff developed a shortlist, selecting the proposals that met all TOR requirements.
- The shortlist, comprising of 13 proposals, was then submitted to the members of the International Selection Committee, which included academics, activists, consultants and the Women's Rights and Citizenship Team Leader. The proposals were translated to English before being sent to Ottawa.
- Four winning projects were selected during a meeting of the Committee held in Buenos Aires from June 12 to 14, 2006.

#### **4. Number of Grantees**

- Sub-Saharan Africa: four grants;<sup>32</sup> South Asia: five grants; LAC: four grants.

#### **5. Expanding IDRC's contacts**

- Expanding IDRC's contacts was not an explicit objective of the Decentralization and Women's Rights research competitions. Nonetheless, as the WRC is a relatively new and expanding program, the competitions were important for creating links between WRC and the researchers and institutions involved in issues related to gender

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29 The Community of Graduates of the Regional Training Program on Gender and Public Policy (PRIGEPP) played a leading role in promoting the competition in their own counties and institutions.

30 Proposals were judged based on the following criteria: quality of proposal/methodology (40%); impact (30%); suitability of candidate (10%); feasibility (20%).

31 The institutions included universities, research centres, NGOs, and consortiums. Many of the organizations had never before addressed gender issues.

32 Five grants had originally been funded, but the Ghana project had to be closed due to serious administrative and implementation issues.

and decentralization.

- Partnering with FLACSO-Argentina, an organization with extensive reach in LAC countries, was seen as a means for developing new contacts and creating greater visibility for IDRC.
- Most of the partner institutions were new to IDRC, although many of the researchers had prior experience working with IDRC.

## 6. Using External Advisors

- All three grant competitions used external advisors for the International Selection Committee.

## 7. Managing Competitive Grants Processes: in-house or by an external grants manager?

- The Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia competitions were managed in-house.
- IDRC partnered with FLACSO-Argentina to manage the LAC competition.
- Preliminary evaluations, and interviews with IDRC staff, recognized that it is very important to ensure that the TORs between IDRC and the partner agency are very clear so that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. Further, when outsourcing components of the competitive grants process for the first time it is important to have someone working very closely with the partner institution.

## 8. Monitoring and Supporting Grantees

- IDRC staff, and FLACSO-Argentina for the LAC competition, monitored projects via email, telephone calls and through site visits. All of the South Asia and LAC projects were visited by IDRC/FLACSO-Argentina, and three of the five projects in Africa were visited by IDRC staff. All of the research teams were invited to attend the Global Decentralization Workshop<sup>33</sup> held in Buenos Aires in August 2006. Unfortunately, due to visa problems only two of the four African projects were represented.
- An inception workshop was planned for the Sub-Saharan Africa competition, but it was cancelled due to scheduling problems that resulted from delays in starting some of the projects. The African researchers did meet in Dakar, Senegal in January, 2008 to discuss the results of their research. This involved a one-day public event, followed by a one-day workshop that included other researchers, experts and donors.
- The Global Decentralization Workshop served as an inception workshop for the South Asian researchers. The Asian research teams also met in Delhi in July 07 for a workshop on preliminary results.<sup>34</sup>
- The Global Decentralization Workshop also served as the inception workshop for the LAC research teams, and there will be another workshop at the conclusion of the research. The LAC teams also participated in information exchanges via email and virtual forums, such as scheduled web conferences organized by FLACSO-Argentina.

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33. Co-organized by IDRC and FLACSO-Argentina, the Global Workshop on Decentralization and Women's Rights brought together research teams from 15 countries. The workshop was designed to create a space for exchange, and most importantly, for theoretical and methodological discussion, that would allow researchers to review their projects, pose new questions, and have access to information resources that would optimize their work. Representatives from IDRC's regional offices and IDRC headquarters and experts on decentralization and gender equity also attended the workshop.

34. Another event may still be held, but this is unknown at this point.

## 9. Working with Runners Up

- Working with runners up was not an objective of the research competitions, however, there has been some follow-up on an ad hoc basis.

## COMPETITIVE GRANTS PROCESSES AS DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES

### 1. Building research capacity

- Capacity building is not a main objective of the Women's Decentralization grant program, primarily because the competitions targeted senior researchers. However, there was evidently a willingness to work with researchers who lacked a strong gender background. For example, the Bolivian researchers were not gender specialists, but contracted a consultant to help guide them through the gender aspects of the research. IDRC and FLACSO-Argentina staff also maintained ongoing communication with the researchers, providing advice on resources and methodology, and generally were available for discussions on various research themes.
- Second level capacity building (i.e. recipients building the capacity of others) has been a focus of the research competitions, primarily involving community partners. The research team from Pakistan, for example, worked with organizations with very different levels of capacity and thus incorporated capacity building measures – methodology workshops, participatory approaches, etc. – into their research.
- Preliminary evaluations noted that the African researchers could have used more support (mainly on research methodology) and that an inception workshop would have been very useful.<sup>35</sup>

### 2. Policy influence and Utilization

- All of the CFPs included a requirement for addressing policy influence and utilization.
- The CFP for the Sub-Saharan African competition, for example, stated that the research proposals were to outline how the research would contribute to 'specific national or other policy debates or processes' and include 'a strong plan for dissemination of the research results in appropriate media and format for different audiences.'<sup>36</sup>
- Results related to policy influence are varied:<sup>37</sup> some of the African projects clearly articulated the policy relevance of their research and had clear policy impacts, and some followed through on good dissemination plans, but for some of the other African researchers this was less clear.

### 3. Networks and Networking

- Networking was not an explicit objective, however, networking remained an implicit goal among IDRC staff and the research teams throughout the grant

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35. (Melissa McLean, 2007)

36. (Melissa McLean, 2007; p.21)

37. Both the South Asian and LAC competitions are ongoing, and thus it is too early to assess results related to policy influence.

competitions.

- According to preliminary evaluations, some networking has occurred among the South Asian and LAC research teams, however, very little networking has occurred among the African researchers. “In the SSA-D competition [African competition], the lack of face-to-face meetings or other contact between researchers during the competition cycle meant there were virtually no networking results.”<sup>38</sup>

#### 4. Sustainability

- Issues related to sustainability were not incorporated in the competitions’ objectives and there were no particular efforts found in this respect.<sup>39</sup>
- Sustainability of the research theme (i.e. ensuring that research continued on this subject), however, was an explicit objective.

#### 5. Supporting Participatory Research

- Supporting participatory research was an objective of the Women’s Decentralization grant competitions. WRC’s mandate is somewhat different from other Pls at IDRC, as it necessarily involves making changes that help to ensure that voices of women in the South are heard. Participatory approaches are thus seen to be fundamental for helping to facilitate this change.
- The majority of the research projects included participatory approaches to varying degrees, working closely with community partners and involving action-research methodologies.

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38 (Melissa McLean, 2007; p.3)

39 IDRC staff did hope to work with some of the research teams in the future, but this wasn’t a specific goal of the Decentralization and Women’s Rights grant competitions.